

SIAM'S POLITICAL FUTURE: DOCUMENTS FROM THE END OF THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHY

Compiled and edited with introductions
by Benjamin A. Batson



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FOREWORD

Since the beginnings of Thailand's modernization in the last half of the nineteenth century, the kingdom's leaders have evinced a painful concern with the question of its political development. As early as the 1880's, King Chulalongkorn had to face both the ultimate necessity of political democratization and the risks such a devolution of royal authority posed to the kingdom's stability; and he prophetically foresaw the rise of the military to a commanding position in the life of the state. The remarkable collection of documents in this volume reflects the final stages of the debate concerning democratization in the reign of King Prajadhipok (1925-1935), in which the king himself took a leading role. The general question then posed was whether, and to what extent, democratic institutions were appropriate to the conditions of Siam. The documents in this volume, now four decades old, still speak to that issue in a debate that has become more urgent and insistent since the events of October, 1973. One of these documents, that announcing King Prajadhipok's abdication in 1935, recently has been revived to wide public currency as a critique of military rule, while most of the others in this collection have never before been published. Their publication now in English provides a valuable historical perspective on Thai political development in the twentieth century. At the same time, they point to the importance of a period and a monarch little studied to date.

Benjamin A. Batson, a doctoral candidate in Southeast Asian History at Cornell University, spent eighteen months in 1972-1973 conducting research in Thailand on the last years of the absolute monarchy and the early years of constitutional government. I am confident that his considerable efforts in making these documents available to a wider audience will earn him the gratitude of all those with a serious interest in, and concern for, "Siam's Political Future."

David K. Wyatt

PREFACE

The documents in this collection come from the National Archives (Bangkok) and books, journals, and newspapers of the period. Documents I, II, V, VII, and VIII have not previously been published. Document III has been published several times in Thai, and was published once in English translation during the Seventh Reign. Documents IV and VI were published in English during the Seventh Reign but have not been republished since, while the final document, IX, has been republished several times in both Thai and English.

Documents I, II, IV, and VII were written in English, while documents III, V, VIII, and IX have been translated from Thai by the editor. The translation of document VI has been taken from the *Bangkok Times*.

In addition to the nine documents, use has been made in the introductions and notes of other materials from the National Archives (Bangkok), National Library (Bangkok), Damrong Library (Bangkok), British and American diplomatic archives, the Francis B. Sayre Papers in the Library of Congress (Washington), and various books, journals, and newspapers.

Thai titles and the names of Thai persons and places have been left in commonly accepted romanizations, without attempting a systematic transliteration. Other Thai words have been transliterated in accordance with the modified Cornell system.

Until 1941 the Thai year began April 1. Thai calendar years have been indicated by the use of a slash; thus 1931/32 is the year beginning April 1, 1931, and ending March 31, 1932.

The two units of Thai currency used in the documents are the 'baht' and the 'tical,' both having the same value which in the last years of the absolute monarchy was equivalent to approximately US\$0.45.

The five titles of awarded nobility under the absolute monarchy were, in ascending order, Khun, Luang, Phra, Phya, and Chao Phya. Since the June 1932 *coup* these titles have not been conferred.

In 1939 'Siam' became 'Thailand,' and except for a brief period shortly after the Second World War has remained 'Thailand' ever since. In this account, however, the name used in the days of the absolute monarchy has been retained.

The editor would like to express appreciation to the staffs of the National Research Council, the National Archives, the National Library, and the Center of Thai Studies at Thammasat University, all in Bangkok, for help and cooperation extended during the research which made this volume possible. A great many individuals have also made important contributions--two who should be particularly recognized are David B. Johnston, through whom the editor first came into contact with several of the documents and ideas presented here, and Chatchai Panananon, a

graduate student in history at the Prasanmitr College of Education, who helped in many ways, including checking some references after the editor had left Bangkok.

Mention must also be made of Professors David K. Wyatt and O. W. Wolters of Cornell University. Professor Wyatt has suggested a number of corrections and improvements and also has kindly written the Foreword; Professor Wolters, although not directly involved in this undertaking, was nonetheless unknowingly (and perhaps unwillingly) a source of the original idea for this volume through his enthusiastic dedication to what he has called "the present duty of historians of South East Asia, which is the ploughing of new fields of study by making available hitherto unpublished sources."

The editor's research in Bangkok in 1972-1973 was made possible by a grant from the Foreign Area Fellowship Program, while financial support at Cornell in 1973-1974, as well as funds for a research trip to Washington, were provided by the Southeast Asia Program of Cornell University.

None of the above, however, should in any way be considered responsible for errors or for the opinions expressed, which are solely those of the editor. Many of the issues raised are complex and have been little studied, and hence are subject to more than one plausible interpretation. The editor claims only to have tried, in so far as possible, to make the factual aspects of the account as accurate as the available documentation permits.

Benjamin A. Batson

Ithaca, New York
May 1974

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INTRODUCTION

THE SEVENTH REIGN

The Seventh Reign (1925-1935) has been the shortest reign of the Bangkok period and, at least for the years prior to the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, one of the least studied. What writing there has been on the period has for the most part come from one or another of the factions involved in the 1932 *coup*. While these factions have been in disagreement among themselves on many issues, one position they have all shared is a critical view of the last years of the absolute monarchy. Even the more conservative royalists have to a degree joined in this criticism, seeing the period as the time when the ineptness of the king and his advisers caused the royal family to lose the exalted position it had held for generations. There has been relatively little study of the events and problems of the period as they appeared to various groups in Thai society at the time, rather than as viewed through the distorting filter of the events of June 1932, and even the basic historical documentation has been little explored, despite the fact that the extensive Seventh Reign archives and a number of other sources are now available. The result is that the conventional view of the last years of the absolute monarchy has been a largely negative and in part misleading one.

Even King Prajadhipok, the last absolute monarch, the 'Lord of Life,' remains a rather shadowy figure in history. No one had ever expected Prajadhipok to become king. He was the seventy-sixth child of King Chulalongkorn, and the thirty-second and last son. His mother was a queen, and hence he was a *chao fa*, the highest princely rank, but when he was born in 1893 the succession was not even in his line of the family. Even when the death of the crown prince in 1895 led to his eldest full brother, Vajiravudh, being made heir, Prajadhipok, the youngest of his mother's nine children (of whom five, all male, survived childhood), still ranked behind his four elder brothers as well as the male children they could be expected to father.

In 1910 Vajiravudh succeeded his father as king, and Prajadhipok continued to rank well down on the probable succession list. Then between 1920 and 1925 a series of deaths in the royal family brought Prajadhipok closer to the throne. In 1920 Prince Chakrabongse, the second brother and heir presumptive, died; in 1923 Prince Chutadhuja, the fourth brother, died; and early in 1925 Prince Asdang, the only brother remaining between Vajiravudh and Prajadhipok, also died. It was only with the death of Asdang that Prajadhipok became even a likely candidate for the throne. Nevertheless, the succession question remained unclear. Chutadhuja had left a young son, Prince Varanand (Prince Chula Chakrabongse, the son of Prince Chakrabongse, was ineligible because his mother was foreign), while there was also some support for Prince Boriphat, a *chao fa* half-brother of Prajadhipok who was both considerably older and much more experienced in government. However Varanand was very young and his mother not royal, while Boriphat was not on good terms with Vajiravudh,¹ who had the right to name his

1. On the day Vajiravudh died and Prajadhipok was named heir the British Minister

successor, and thus it was widely thought that should Vajiravudh remain childless Prajadhipok would be the probable heir, a belief that was reinforced when after the death of Asdang the king appointed Prajadhipok to act as his representative whenever he was ill or away from the capital. However, uncertainty again surrounded the succession question when it was announced in mid-1925 that one of Vajiravudh's wives was expecting a child. In the last days before the anticipated birth Vajiravudh became seriously ill, and it was doubtful whether the king would live long enough to see his only child. The baby, born November 24, was a girl and hence ineligible to succeed to the throne; Vajiravudh died on November 26, leaving behind a letter which, as expected, passed over the possible claims of Varanand and Boriphat and named Prajadhipok as his heir.²

Thus when Prajadhipok became absolute ruler of Siam in November of 1925 he had been a likely heir less than a year and a fairly certain heir for only two days. He had just passed his thirty-second birthday, and the greater part of his training and career had been in the military. He had spent a considerable part of his life studying in Europe, first in England and then in France, and had returned to Siam from the Ecole de Guerre only in 1924. Only since the death of Asdang had he played any important role in the government. Not only had Prajadhipok never expected to be king, he appears not to have particularly wanted to be king, and, citing his youth and lack of experience, when Vajiravudh died he offered to step aside in favor of Boriphat or another senior member of the royal family (see I).

This then, to use Prajadhipok's own words (see I), was the "dark horse" who in November of 1925 succeeded to the only major absolute monarchy remaining in the world. What he received was described by Prince Damrong as a "deplorable inheritance" (see I). There was a widespread feeling in the government that for all his acknowledged abilities, Vajiravudh had not been a success as king.³ As described

in Bangkok reported that, according to Sir Edward Cook, the Financial Adviser, most of the Thai elite had not been anxious for Boriphat to become king--the older generation because they feared he would be too strong and overbearing, and the younger, foreign-educated generation because they wanted an end to absolute rule. These, according to Cook, had welcomed the Sixth Reign as discrediting the monarchy, but they feared that Boriphat would be a strong, able, and successful king and "would have given a new lease of life to autocratic rule in Siam." Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 6257/183/40 (November 26, 1925), Greg to Chamberlain.

2. The letter, written before the daughter was born, named Prajadhipok to head a council of regency if the child were male. Prince Dhani, "Life of King Prajadhipok" (in Thai, 1949), in *Chumnum Nippon* (ชุมนุมนิพนธ์; Collected Works), Bangkok, 1964, p. 9.
3. In December of 1925 Prince Boriphat, in discussing possible reign names for the new king, reportedly told the British Minister "not Rama anyhow--we have done with Ramas" (Vajiravudh had styled himself 'Rama VI,' and, posthumously, his predecessors in the dynasty 'Rama I' through 'Rama V'; Prajadhipok did not use 'Rama VII'), and added "it must never happen again," which the British Minister considered an obvious reference to the past reign. Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 260/78/40 (December 18, 1925), Greg to Chamberlain.

British diplomats in general were highly critical of Vajiravudh, who they thought--as did many Thai--did not act as a king should. It should be noted that the British judged Vajiravudh mainly on his administrative and financial record,

in the documents in I, the end of the Sixth Reign found the administration in disorder, the monarchy in disrepute, and the state finances deeply in the red.⁴ Prajadhipok's response was in part what may be described as a 'return to Chulalongkorn'--the Fifth Reign now became the model to be emulated, and its policies and in some cases even its personnel were brought back (see III). The commoner favorites of Vajiravudh were removed from high office, and Prajadhipok, like his father, tended to rely much more on members of the royal family, whom Vajiravudh had to a degree ignored. Among those rehabilitated was Prince Damrong, a younger half-brother of Chulalongkorn who in the Fifth Reign had held high positions in the military and in education, and had then served for many years as Minister of the Interior, in which office he carried out a major reform of the whole internal administration of Siam. In 1915 he had been dismissed by Vajiravudh and had spent the remainder of the Sixth Reign outside the circle of royal favor, which was to be a blessing for Thai historiography as removed from high office he turned his considerable talents and energies to cultural and scholarly pursuits. At the beginning of the Seventh Reign however he returned to the center of power as a member of the Supreme Council of State, and down to June of 1932 he remained one of the most influential voices in the government.

Another high member of the royal family, and an outspoken critic of Vajiravudh, who had spent most of the Sixth Reign in relatively minor positions was Prince Boriphat, who now became a member of the Supreme Council of State, and, successively, head of the two most powerful Ministries, War and Interior.

The Seventh Reign, as noted above, began amid serious difficulties. It then went through a period of apparent success, when the future of the reign and the monarchy looked bright, and was finally caught up in the even more serious difficulties which were to impel events toward the end of the absolute monarchy in June of 1932. The first and most important policy of the new king was one of strict economy in all spheres of government. A sweeping program of 'retrenchment,' similar to the better known case of 1931-1932, was undertaken. The government bureaucracy was cut back substantially, and ministry budgets reduced. King Prajadhipok himself set the example by ordering that the largest cuts be in royal expenses. So successful was the program of economy

which were not his strengths, and were largely unable to appreciate his contributions to Thai literature, arts, and social and political thought. Of all the important figures of the early Seventh Reign the two least critical of Vajiravudh were the king, who apparently retained a genuine affection for his brother, and Prince Bhanurangsi, the senior prince of the royal family, whose attitude may have been less influenced by personalities than by his belief that the monarchy as an institution should be above criticism.

4. Most foreigners, as well as many Thai, blamed the financial situation on excessive royal expenditures and, to a lesser degree, excessive military spending. In June of 1925 the new Financial Adviser, Sir Edward Cook, who was having difficulty even getting to see Vajiravudh, much less influence policy, submitted a memorandum on Siam's financial position in which he pointed out that in the monarchies of Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, and Norway royal expenditures ranged from a low of 0.13% to a high of 0.33% of the total national budget, whereas for Siam the figure was 10.7%. Even this figure he considered an underestimate, as a number of items which should properly have been classified as royal expenses were "tucked away" in the ordinary budget. National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 37/35.

that by early 1928 the problem had become what to do with the large surpluses piling up in the government account, and the king, the Supreme Council of State, and the Financial Adviser, Sir Edward Cook, were credited with financial genius. This situation, however, proved short-lived, and as the effects of the world depression began to reach Siam from 1930 onward, the country slid into an economic crisis which was to undermine seriously the prestige of the absolute monarchy, and of the king and his advisers personally, and to be a major factor precipitating the *coup* of June 1932.

While the economic situation stands out as perhaps the major concern of the period 1925-1932, a number of other significant developments should be noted. Communism and the various Marxist and non-Marxist independence movements throughout Southeast Asia were for the first time perceived as a serious problem for the government, and major communist figures like Ho Chi Minh and Tan Malaka, as well as shadowy agents like the mysterious Slater, reportedly used Siam as a base of operations, complicating Siam's relations with the European colonial powers (see V). The government also began for the first time to take effective steps to restrict Chinese immigration, a marked departure from the policy of the Sixth Reign, in which the rhetoric, with the encouragement of Vajiravudh himself, had been much more anti-Chinese but in which virtually no measures restricting Chinese activities had been implemented (see I). In relations with the West, a series of new treaties were concluded with the Western powers which foreshadowed the eventual relinquishing of special Western rights in Siam. The greater part of the long and difficult negotiations for these treaties had been conducted in the Sixth Reign, a part of Vajiravudh's policy of asserting full sovereignty in foreign relations, a field in which he was more successful than in domestic affairs.

The technological modernization begun in Chulalongkorn's reign continued, largely under the direction of the dynamic prince Purachatra, with major emphasis on the construction of railways. Socially, Western culture continued to make inroads on tradition, while elite society was becoming increasingly more differentiated with the formation of various formal or informal associations representing business, professional, and other special interests. One such group which exercised an influence far out of proportion to its size was the group of students educated in the West, whether active participants or passive observers of the June 1932 *coup* which toppled the absolute monarchy (see IV).

Political developments, with which the present collection of documents is primarily concerned, were dominated by the attempts of King Prajadhipok to devise institutional innovations which would put restraints on the monarchy and allow the people a voice in the government without, however, seriously upsetting the traditional political, social, and economic order. In this he ultimately failed, but nevertheless the efforts are of interest and significance. The turbulent post-1932 political history of Siam and Thailand shows that many of the political issues which so troubled the last years of the absolute monarchy have remained unresolved.

The king saw more clearly than any of his principal advisers the dangers inherent in the absolute monarchy and the necessity for change. Two tentative but significant steps to enlarge the circle of leadership were taken--the creation at the very beginning of the reign of the Supreme Council of State and the creation in 1927 of the Committee of the Privy Council, concerning which Documents I and II provide important

information. Equally important are the documents (I, II, VIIr, VIIl) describing various proposed political changes which were not effected, together with some of the reasons why they were not. In connection with these documents it should be noted that new developments and differently perceived situations may be expected to lead to changes in opinions, and King Prajadhipok's rather pessimistic assessment of the utility of representative political institutions in Siam in documents I and II (1926, 1927) contrasts with his views, both stated and implied, in documents VIIr and VIIl (1932).

A related point which the king stressed in his introduction to Chulalongkorn's speech on administrative reform (III) and elsewhere was the importance of the timing of change, and particularly his belief that to achieve the proper timing necessary to successful change requires not only good judgment and planning but an element of luck as well. Thus by early 1932 when the economic crisis was causing Prajadhipok to complain of "my bad luck" (VI) one senses a certain fatalism and a feeling that men, even absolute monarchs, are no longer able to control events. This problem of the pace of political change, as well as its direction, was one widely discussed among the Thai elite throughout the last years of the absolute monarchy, and especially in the Bangkok press in an unusual period of journalistic license in 1925-1927.

On June 24, 1932, the People's Party, under the leadership of the civilian Pridi Phanomyong and the soldier Phya Phahon, overthrew the absolute monarchy and inaugurated the constitutional era in Siam.⁵ After a relatively short period of good will and high expectations, serious divisions appeared within the political leadership of the country. One of the most important of these divisions was between the king and the faction that came to dominate the government, resulting finally in the end of the reign with Prajadhipok's abdication in March of 1935.

The central figure of the documents and the above account of the reign is King Prajadhipok, not because of a special predilection toward monarchy but because so long as the absolute monarchy endured it is virtually impossible to discuss Thai political history without dealing in some detail with the person who occupied the supreme political office. Prajadhipok's accession in 1925 was to be the last time that the accession of a new king led to immediate major changes in government policy.

The king labored under a number of handicaps. Throughout the reign he was never in good health, and in the latter years he developed serious eye problems which threatened him with blindness. Unlike his three immediate predecessors, Mongkut, Chulalongkorn, and Vajiravudh, he wrote very little for publication and thus forfeited this potentially

5. A constitution was an alien concept in the Siam of 1932, and even less understood than such institutions as consultative assemblies, which in their Western form had a history going back to the Fifth Reign, and in more traditional form a history as old as the Thai political entity. King Prajadhipok wrote to his nephew Chula Chakrabongse shortly after the promulgation of the permanent Constitution in December 1932, ". . . the actual fact is that this movement for a constitution is not as popular in Siam as one might expect." Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand* (London, 2nd edition, 1967), p. 316.

Earlier in 1932 the People's Party had sent teams of speakers into the countryside to explain and generate support for the Constitution.

powerful instrument for influencing public opinion. Furthermore, by the early twentieth century the increasing complexity of government had made it practically impossible for one man to fulfill all the functions of the absolute monarchy. There was little delegated authority, and even the most minor decisions had to be personally approved by the king, resulting in a voluminous paperwork. In addition to the substantive work of government, the king was also responsible for the affairs of a very extensive royal family as well as for the major secular and religious ceremonies of the country. This became a particularly great burden as the April 1932 celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of the dynasty approached. As absolute monarch, the king was held personally accountable for all adverse developments affecting the national welfare, even, as Prajadhipok once noted with resignation, the weather, while receiving little or no credit for successes.⁶ By his own admission, Prajadhipok was particularly inexperienced in financial affairs (see I, VI) which by an irony of fate would come to be the central issue of the reign. As Prajadhipok himself reportedly said during the 1931-1932 economic crisis, "I'm only a soldier, how can I understand such things as the Gold Standard?"⁷

Finally, Prajadhipok had certain personal qualities which added to the difficulties of his position. Modest, if not shy, he had an unusual willingness to admit mistakes and to be critical of himself.⁸ But what may be virtues in ordinary men may not necessarily be so in an absolute ruler, for the perpetuation of the absolute monarchy depended in part on the maintenance of the illusion of infallibility, or at least an uncommon order of perfection, in the Lords of Life. Prajadhipok's striking honesty and candor in public as well as private could only encourage those who considered themselves better qualified to govern.

If Prajadhipok had several handicaps in fulfilling the demanding duties of his office, he also had a number of assets, perhaps the most important of which were his extreme conscientiousness and diligence and his devotion to the welfare of Siam and the Thai people. He was not, as some believed, a royal nonentity controlled by reactionary relatives, but was capable on occasion of overruling the opinions of such powerful advisers as Prince Boriphat (see II), and he could accuse his own bureaucracy of "Administrative tyranny" and "criminal neglect of an obvious duty."⁹ Although he had no background or detailed knowledge of

6. National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 7/2. This passage is quoted in Chai-anan Samuthwanich, et al., editors, *Sat Kan Muang* (ศัพท์การเมือง), Bangkok, 1971, p. 11.

7. Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life*, p. 307.

8. See document VI, and also the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Finance, 15.d/1, in which Prajadhipok blames himself for not having programs prepared to make productive use of the anticipated 1928/29 budget surplus. (This latter is quoted in *Sat Kan Muang*, p. 9.) The royal secretary, however, in incorporating Prajadhipok's memorandum into a letter left out this passage.

9. National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 1/69, and National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Commerce and Communications, 8.1/1. The first reference is a 1929 draft letter to all ministries criticizing the common practice according to which officials who had shown themselves to be incompetent or corrupt were merely transferred to a new post rather than being punished; the second

agriculture, he realized intuitively, and to a greater degree than any other high official of the government--including those working directly in agriculture--the extent to which every aspect of Thai life must ultimately depend upon conditions in the countryside. Thus the king gave personal attention and support to the pioneering efforts of Prince Sithiporn (see II) to modernize Thai agriculture,¹⁰ to a variety of government programs in agriculture, and to such projects as the 1931 survey of rural economic conditions and a special 1932 study of conditions in the Northeast. His views on questions of race, nationalism, and religion were markedly moderate and tolerant (see IX). This very moderation was a factor in his postponing, until events took the question out of his hands, political changes which he himself had repeatedly advocated. It has been said of Chang Chien, 'the Confucian industrialist,' a leading figure of the last years of the imperial dynasty and the first years of the republican era in China, that his misfortune was to be "a moderate man in an immoderate time."¹¹ Prajadhipok was also a moderate man in an immoderate time;¹¹ whether anyone in his office could have succeeded in achieving the kind of peaceful, gradual, and limited political change Prajadhipok desired is open to question, but the various proposed political changes of the last years of the absolute monarchy, whether implemented or considered and rejected, constitute an important and undeservedly neglected stage in the history of modern Thai political development.

The nine documents or sets of documents in this volume cover the years 1926 to 1935, and are arranged chronologically. The first group of documents, a set of three memoranda exchanged by the king and two advisers in 1926, covers a wide range of topics but most particularly the dangers inherent in the absolute monarchy and the possibility of political changes looking toward a more representative form of government. Document II, "Democracy in Siam," is a memorandum by the king occasioned by the debate over the establishment of the Committee of the

reference is to margin notes Prajadhipok made on a 1930 Ministry of Agriculture memorandum on the condition of the rice industry, recommending various measures which the king believed should have been initiated long before. In both cases the phrases quoted are in English in an otherwise Thai text.

10. The king even proposed making Prince Sithiporn Minister of Agriculture, but was dissuaded in this by the Supreme Council of State (National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Commerce and Communications, 2/13). Prince Sithiporn did become an adviser to the government in 1931, and in 1932 Director-General of the Department of Agricultural Research.
11. Chang Chien, like Prajadhipok, had ability, industry, and dedication, and left behind some significant accomplishments, but nevertheless came to be regarded by himself and many of his contemporaries as something of a failure.

Another figure who invites comparison with Prajadhipok is the American President Herbert Hoover. Both Hoover and Prajadhipok were conscientious and hard-working and, in the first years of their rule, successful and popular; both however encountered severe economic difficulties which contributed to their fall from power in the same year of 1932; both blamed their problems on international economic forces beyond their control (an argument that was more valid in the case of Siam than of the United States; it should also be noted that, unlike Prajadhipok, Hoover had had broad experience in economic affairs); and in recent years both have been the subjects of a re-examination and re-evaluation by historians.

Privy Council in 1927, while III, also written by the king in 1927, discusses the reforms of Chulalongkorn and the question of the proper timing of change. Documents IV (1928) and V (1930) are the only two documents of the collection originating outside the government; the first is an essay by a Thai student in England on what the policy of Siam should be toward the challenge of Western civilization, and the second a Marxist analysis of the Thai economic and political structure. The next three documents are all from early 1932, the last months of the absolute monarchy--VI is King Prajadhipok's famous February address on the economic crisis; VII is the plan for the establishment of a constitution and a measure of representative government which, on the king's orders, was secretly prepared in March; and VIII is a letter of the king, written shortly before the *coup*, discussing possible political alternatives for Siam. The final document is Prajadhipok's 1935 abdication statement and thus does not, strictly speaking, belong to the period of the absolute monarchy. It has been included because both chronologically and in substance it marks the end of the era; because it provides a succinct summary of the king's version of his dispute with the government and his political hopes for Siam; because in recent years it has become something of a political manifesto for advocates of democracy in Thailand, frequently cited or quoted; and because most existing translations are incomplete and/or in some degree inaccurate.

In addition to the nine major documents, other materials from Thai, British, and American archives and from books, journals, and newspapers have been used in the various introductions and notes.

I. THE PROBLEMS OF SIAM

Introduction

The following set of three memoranda resulted from the visit to Siam in the summer of 1926 of Francis B. Sayre. Sayre had been one of a series of professors of Harvard Law School to serve as Adviser in Foreign Affairs to the government of Siam. He had been appointed in 1924, originally for a period of one year, and then had spent another year in the service of Siam in Europe, negotiating new treaties between Siam and the Western powers which stipulated the gradual abolition of the various special rights and privileges which the West had enjoyed in Siam since the mid-nineteenth century.¹ Treaty revision and the elimination of extraterritoriality and other judicial, political, and economic restrictions on Thai autonomy had long been one of the most cherished goals of the Thai government, and Sayre's success in this difficult undertaking gave him immense prestige in Siam. At the time of his visit to Bangkok in 1926, the British Minister reported unhappily of "the singular influence over the Siamese Government acquired by Dr. Francis B. Sayre," whom he conceded had done much good for Siam, and, he thought, some harm as well.² Among other honors, Sayre received from the government of Siam the Thai title of nobility 'Phya Kalyan Maitri'³ and it is with this title that he signed his memorandum, and

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1. Sayre's own account of the problems encountered in revising Siam's treaties with the West, and how they were overcome, is given in his autobiography *Glad Adventure* (New York, 1957; Thai translation, Bangkok, 1972), Chapters 7 and 8, and in the two articles cited in note 5 of the notes on the three memoranda. The first Western government leader to agree to give up his country's special privileges in Siam had been Woodrow Wilson, who was Sayre's father-in-law.^a
 2. Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 3572/78/40 (July 29, 1926), Waterlow to Chamberlain. British diplomats generally took a dim view of American advisers and missionaries in Siam, whom they regarded as well-meaning but misguided meddlers. Waterlow wrote that "The Siamese adore Americans," including some "who one would think had nothing in particular to recommend them." This he attributed to the United States being "a perpetual fountain of gifts"--schools, money, 'uplift,' etc., and also to the American character with its hail-fellow-well-met bonhomie. As Waterlow saw the American, "His stock of moral platitudes is successful for the same reason that Ford cars are successful; it is standardized and it is the same for all men regardless of colour and size." Earlier another British Minister in Bangkok had complained of Sayre and his predecessors being "idealistically-minded theorists without any practical experience of Siamese administration outside Bangkok, and always ready, whether from interest or conviction, to take the Siamese at their own valuation . . .," to which a hand in the Foreign Office in London appended a note on "the harm done by well-meaning American advice,--that great menace to civilization." (Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 1687/183/40, April 9, 1925, Greg to Chamberlain.)
 3. 'Phya' was the second highest rank of awarded nobility and, except in a very few cases, the highest ever given to Westerners. 'Kalyan' means 'beautiful' or

that Prince Damrong refers to him; King Prajadhipok, however, uses 'Dr. Sayre.'

Sayre continued to hold his "singular influence" long after he left Thai service. In the late 1930's he was appointed Governor-General of the Philippines, and an American intelligence report prepared during the Second World War noted that, "Francis B. Sayre's work as adviser to the Thai government on foreign affairs is well known in Thailand and is so highly regarded that before the war Thai diplomats crossing the Pacific were always instructed to stop in the Philippines and pay their respects to him."⁴

Sayre returned to Bangkok in the summer of 1926 at the request of King Prajadhipok, who had succeeded his elder brother Vajiravudh only a few months earlier. In his autobiography Sayre has briefly described this visit as follows:⁵

I could not forget Siam. Often in my mind I was still living in the Far East. In November, 1925, King Rama VI, whom I had known and worked with, died. He was succeeded by his half-brother Prajadhipok; and King Prajadhipok expressed the strong desire to have me come back to Siam. Although I could not give up my work at Harvard, I visited Bangkok during the 1926 summer holidays at his request to confer with him and advise him as to some of the pressing demands for constitutional reforms.

The deep-rooted and far-reaching conflict between East and West was beginning to beset Siam. Students returning from England or France or America often were unhappy and disturbed, with half-baked ideas about democracy and human liberty; they wanted Siam to adopt Western forms almost overnight, as if these were but outward garments. Many felt that Siamese culture was outdated, and their minds seethed with modern, Western ideas, often superficial and misunderstood. One of their outspoken demands was for a Parliament and a modern Constitution.

Discussing these issues with His Majesty, I had to point out the inherent dangers. In Siam there was no middle class. The Siamese peasants took little or no interest in public affairs but lived their simple lives in secluded rural districts. To set up a legislature and clothe it with real power overnight without an educated electorate to control it would be likely, I suggested, to invite trouble and possible corruption. Power uncontrolled was almost bound to breed corruption.

'excellent' and 'Maitri' 'friendship,' a reference to Sayre's success in the conduct of Siam's foreign relations.

4. United States, Office of Strategic Services, "Social Conditions, Attitudes and Propaganda in Thailand with Suggestions for American Orientation Toward the Thai" (Washington, June 19, 1942), p. 13.
5. *Glad Adventure*, p. 129. Prajadhipok was a full brother of Rama VI, not a half-brother. Minor errors like this are frequent in Sayre's accounts of Siam. (The drafts of *Glad Adventure*, in the Sayre Papers in the Library of Congress, show that Sayre originally had it right, but then 'corrected' the text. The file on "Siam" in the Sayre Papers contains correspondence from the 1920's to the 1950's, including several letters exchanged with King Prajadhipok and with the present King.)

Other important issues upon which the King sought advice were how best to choose a successor to the throne, what changes if any should be made in the framework of government, whether or not to appoint a Premier. As I talked with him I felt the utter sincerity of the new monarch and his real desire to lead Siam into modern nationhood.

King Prajadhipok's seeking of advice from Sayre is characteristic. The young king frequently referred to his lack of experience in government and his fears that he would be unequal to the responsibilities of absolute monarchy, while Sayre was a trusted adviser from the previous reign who had successfully advocated Siam's cause in the difficult field of international diplomacy, and who while having firsthand experience in Siam was still an 'outsider' who could be expected to put the interests of the country ahead of the interests of any special group.

King Prajadhipok's letter to Sayre indicates that Sayre and the king first met to discuss the king's memorandum, and that Sayre subsequently submitted his opinions in writing. The king then sent copies of both his own and Sayre's memoranda to Prince Damrong, whose draft replies are dated five days after the date of Sayre's memorandum. Whether the king asked for opinions on his exchange of views with Sayre from other advisers is uncertain. It is possible that he did--documents on important matters were often circulated to all the members of the Supreme Council of State for comment--but in the papers of Prince Damrong, from which copies of the three memoranda have been taken, there is no conclusive evidence one way or another.⁶

Of the three memoranda, that of King Prajadhipok, entitled "Problems of Siam," is of the greatest interest to the historian. It sets forth, in the form of nine questions, what the king saw as the most important problems facing the country at the beginning of the Seventh Reign, together with some historical background and explanations. The first two questions concern the problem of royal succession and how best to insure that a competent king would always occupy the throne. (The king returned frequently to this question--see the similar remarks in II.) The third and fourth questions concern whether or not some form of representative government would be desirable in Siam and the fifth through seventh questions concern the role of the Supreme Council of State and the possibility of having a prime minister and a legislative council. The last two questions, which are treated only briefly, are on financial affairs and how to encourage the assimilation of the large Chinese minority in Siam.

The discussion by the king himself on kingship and the royal family in Siam is of considerable interest, as is the information on the reasons behind the establishment of the Supreme Council of State. There are some deliberately oblique but still explicit references to the financial and administrative problems of the last years of the

6. There is a letter (in Thai) dated October 8, 1926, from Chao Phya Mahithon, the head of the Royal Secretariat, to Prince Damrong saying that the king has ordered that all of the "various" papers relating to his memorandum be collected together, and that from a letter of August 1 it appears that Prince Damrong submitted a memorandum on the subject which cannot now be found, presumably because it was sent to Sayre and not returned. Chao Phya Mahithon therefore requests that Prince Damrong send a copy of his memorandum to the Royal Secretariat. (National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/32.)

Sixth Reign, including frank discussion of the favoritism and corruption that were thought to characterize the court clique, and the consequent decline in the prestige of the monarchy. Sayre also makes discrete reference to the failings of the Sixth Reign, while Prince Damrong, who did not have cordial relations with King Vajiravudh, speaks bluntly of Prajadhipok's "deplorable inheritance"--". . . the authority of the sovereign had fallen much in respect and confidence, the treasury was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the government was corrupted and the services more or less in confusion."

In view of the later history of the reign, there is special significance in King Prajadhipok's admission, "I will not say much about financial affairs as I do feel that I am not competent in the matter."

Sayre, in his lengthy memorandum, replies to each of the king's questions except the final one concerning the Chinese, on which subject he says he will need time for more study before being able to express an opinion. The greater part of his argument concerns a proposal for determining the succession through the selection of a provisional heir by the king with the advice and consent of the Privy Council at fixed intervals, and an exposition of the advantages which he believes would result from the introduction of a prime minister system of government. He includes an outline preliminary draft of a constitution embodying the political institutions he proposes.

Prince Damrong says at the outset that he will discuss only those issues raised by Sayre which have immediate implications, and most of his memorandum is devoted to arguing against Sayre's proposal for the appointment of a prime minister responsible for the day-to-day administration of the government. While a number of objections are marshalled, the one that always seems to be uppermost in Prince Damrong's mind is that the appointment of a prime minister would inevitably diminish the prestige and authority of the monarchy.

All three memoranda have been taken from the copies in Prince Damrong's files.⁷ A few obvious errors in spelling and grammar have been corrected.

7. National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47 (อภิรัฐมนตรี) / 32 (บันทึกการปกครอง).

A. KING PRAJADHIPOK'S MEMORANDUM

Sukhodaya Palace
July 23rd 1926

Dear Dr. Sayren,

I am sending you with this letter a Memorandum on some of the Problems of Siam with a Questionnaire for your consideration. I am afraid I have written it in rather a hurry so that I could send it to you before our conversation to-morrow. We will have a preliminary talk to-morrow when we can discuss those questions more fully. I should like to have your answer in writing when you have considered them fully.

This Memorandum by no means exhausts all the problems of the country. I have only treated of those that I think important. If you have any other opinions beside the question touched upon, they will be very welcome.

I hope that they are making you comfortable at the Phya Thai Hotel.

Yours sincerely,
(M.R.) Prajadhipok R.

PROBLEMS OF SIAM

1. The Constitution

a) The position of the King. The Kings of Siam are supposed to be elected by the people. In former days a Ceremony of election was performed. At the death of the King, a Council consisting of Royal Princes, Ministers of State and High Dignitaries of the Church was held. The Senior Prince or Minister then proposes that such and such a Prince should be elevated to the Throne and asks if anybody has any objection. There is generally no answer to this question, but sometimes an answer in the affirmative is given by saluting with the hands or an inclination of the head. The King is then formally proclaimed, and the words "elected by the people" are added to his titles.

This custom was continued to the Fifth Reign. King Chulalongkorn then made an innovation by creating a Crown Prince, who succeeded to

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1. The first Crown Prince was Vajirunhis, the elder brother of Prince Mahidol, who died in 1895 before coming to the throne. His half-brother Vajiravudh was then elevated to the rank of Crown Prince, and succeeded to the throne in 1910.

the Throne without question, the formality at the death of the King being a sort of proclamation only.

King Rama 6th, not having any son, it was decided [decided] in a Cabinet Council that he should be succeeded by his full brothers. Later he made a law of succession.

This Law of Succession contains 2 distinct principles i.e. the Principle of election and the Principle of Hereditary succession. In this law it starts by saying that the King reserves the absolute right of appointing any member of the Royal Family as his Successor. But should the King die without having appointed a Successor, the Succession will go to his sons. This sounds straight-forward enough, but a complication arises here owing to the habit of polygamy. The Law specifies that the sons of Somdet Phra Rajini should have the precedence over the others. Then the preference goes to the sons of the mother next in rank to the Queen (there are 4 different ranks) and descending the scale finally to the sons of concubines. Again this sounds all right in principle, if it were not for the fact that a concubine may be raised in rank at any time, AND the Queen herself may have her rank lowered according to the whims of the King. This, to my mind, creates very great possibilities of complications. I would suggest that priority of the sons be regulated by the birth ranks of the mothers. I mean priority be given to the sons born of a Princess, such as daughters of a King, then nieces of a King and so on. If there are more than one son of mothers of the same rank, the succession would then go by the seniority in age of those Princes. When there are no sons the succession would go to the King's brothers. According to the Law as it is, the priority is still regulated by the *created* rank of the mothers. I would suggest the same modification as above. The next question is that the Law does not make it quite clear, when there being no brothers left or when the one who should have succeeded has died, whether all the sons of that Prince would be eligible to the Throne or whether it is only the sons of the Principal wife only who could succeed. The case has really occurred which shows that in the late King's mind ALL the sons could succeed. In my case the son of the Prince of Petchabun was passed over by the expressed wishes of the late King. Now, many people find that the idea that ALL the sons could succeed was objectionable owing to the fact that some Princes have the most disreputable minor wives who are really not fitted to be the mothers of kings. They also say that the Siamese follow the Indian custom and want their Kings to be born of a Princess of the Royal Family. Such Princes are known as "being born in a pure womb." They are the Chow Fads.

The questions of principles involved, of which I would like to ask your opinions are:

1st Question Should the King have the right to choose any Prince as his Heir? If the King has this right, ought not this

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2. The Prince of Petchabun was Chutadhuja, the fourth of the five brothers, who had died in 1923 leaving a son, Prince Varanand. After the death of the third brother, Prince Asdang, early in 1925, it appeared that according to the 1924 Law of Succession Prince Varanand, who was only three years old, would be the legal heir to the throne, despite the fact that his mother was not royal. However, the law applied only if the late king failed to designate a successor, and when Vajiravudh died without male issue he passed over Prince Varanand and, as expected, named his last remaining full brother, Prajadhipok, as his heir.

right to be extended to a Council of High Princes and Ministers of State, in the case when the King dies without having chosen an Heir. At present the King alone has the right to nominate an Heir. It would be perhaps more logical to allow a Council of some sort to exercise that right when the King has not done so. This would be more consistent with the idea of an Elected King.

2nd Question Should the principle of choice be admitted at all or ought the succession to be by birth alone, and ought there to be some amendments to the present law or not?

b) The As you well know, the King has absolute power in every-
Powers thing. This principle is very good and very suitable for
of the the country *as long as we have a good King*. If the King
Kingo is really an Elected King, it is probable that he would be
a fairly good King. But this idea of election is really a
very theoretical one, and in reality the King[s] of Siam are really
hereditary, with a very limited possibility of choice. Such being the
case, it is not at all certain that we shall always have a good King.
Then the absolute power may become a positive danger to the country.
Besides this, things have very much changed. In olden days the actions
of the King were hardly ever questioned. It would not have been safe
to do so. The King was really respected and his words were really
laws. But things began to change with the new order of things. In the
days of King Chulalongkorn, the King was still very much feared and re-
spected. Even then towards to [sic] the end of the Reign, there was a
young party who began to criticize the King in many ways, but not open-
ly. In the Reign which has just ended, things got much worse, for many
reasons which I have no need to tell you, as you know them well enough.
The King has become a person liable to be influenced by anybody who
could gain the ears of a favourite. Every official is more or less
suspected of embezzlement or nepotism. Fortunately the Princes were
still respected as being on the whole honest folks. What was very re-
grettable was that the Court was heartily detested and in the later
years was on the verge of being ridiculed. The birth of FREE PRESS
aggravated matters still more. The position of the King has become one
of great difficulty. The movements of opinion in this country give a
sure sign that the days of Autocratic Rulership are numbered. The
position of the King must be made more secure if this Dynasty is going
to last. Some sort of GUARANTEE must be found against an unwise King.

What form should the Government of Siam take?

3rd Question Must this country have a Parliamentary system one day,
and is really the Anglo-Saxon type of Parliamentary Gov-
ernment suitable to an Eastern People?

4th Question Is this country ready to have some sort of representa-
tive Government?

I personally have my doubts as to the 3rd question. As to the 4th
question, my personal opinion is an emphatic NO.

What then should be done in the meanwhile? My first attempt to
find some sort of guarantee for the person of the King is the creation
of the Supreme Council.

c) The Supreme Council The Genesis of the Supreme Council is worth telling with some detail. I have discussed the idea of such a Council among my friends for some time, before I had any idea that I would have the opportunity of creating it myself. The idea found a firm supporter in Prince Damrong. Just one day before the late King's death, I consulted the Princes Bhanurangsi and Paribatra about this idea.³ The former was not very keen on it, as he thought it would lessen the prestige of the King, but the latter was enthusiastic. When the King died, it was decided that the Supreme Council should be created at once. We had 2 days only to prepare a proclamation, and 3 days after the death of the late King, the Supreme Council was proclaimed by the means of a speech to the Privy Councillors.

I will now explain the reasons for creating this Council in such a hurry. As you know, the late King was beginning to lose the confidence of the people towards the end of the Reign and the question of Succession caused great anxieties. The only High Prince with any reputation was Prince Paribatra and many people would have liked the succession to go to him, while it was well known that the King was expecting to have a child, and should he not have a boy the succession would go to his brothers whom, I am sorry to say, the majority of people did not think much of. For myself, I was a dark horse and in any case inexperienced in affairs of state. Very fortunately for me, on the death of my brother Asdang, I had several occasions to act for the King during his absence from the Capital and during his illness. I was fortunate enough to have been able to gain the confidence of the Ministers and High Princes, so that my candidature to the Throne had the approval of those persons. I also had the best support from Prince Paribatra.⁴

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3. Prince Bhanurangsi was a younger full brother of King Chulalongkorn, and the senior prince of the royal family during the period. He was regarded as a conservative in most matters, and a staunch defender of royal prerogative. Prince Bhanurangsi died in June of 1928. Prince Boriphat (Paribatra) was a *chao fa* son of King Chulalongkorn, and a powerful figure in the Seventh Reign, serving successively as Minister of War and Minister of the Interior. Immediately after the 1932 *coup* he was sent into exile, and he died in Java in 1944.

The other two original members of the Supreme Council of State, in addition to Prince Bhanurangsi, Prince Boriphat, and Prince Damrong, were Prince Naris, a *chao fa* son of King Mongkut, and Prince Kitayakorn (the Prince of Chantaburi), a son of King Chulalongkorn. Of these, Prince Boriphat, Prince Damrong, and Prince Naris continued to serve on the Supreme Council until the 1932 *coup*.

4. Prince Boriphat (Paribatra) was older than Prajadhipok, and more experienced in government. His mother was also a queen, and as Prajadhipok himself says, many people would have preferred that Boriphat succeed. Boriphat however loyally supported his younger half-brother as the legitimate successor designated by the late king, and he even turned down an offer by Prajadhipok to step aside in his favor. There is an account of this episode by Pridi, who says that his source of information was members of the royal family and high officials, in Pramot Phungsunthon, editor, *Bang Ruang kieokap Phraboromawongsanuwong nai rawang Songkham Lok Khrang Thi 2* (บางเรื่องเกี่ยวกับพระบรมวงศานุวงศ์ในระหว่างสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2; Some Accounts Concerning the Royal Family During the Second World War), Bangkok, 1972, pp. 92-94. See also the accounts in Wichai Prasangsit, *Phaendin Somdet Phra Pokklao* (แผ่นดินสมเด็จพระปกเกล้า; The Reign of King Prajadhipok), Bangkok, 1962, pp. 87-89; and Prince Dhani, *Chumnam Nippon*, pp. 8-9.

Prince Boriphat has usually been depicted in post-1932 writings as a reactionary and sinister power behind the throne in the Seventh Reign. The evidence from

On my succession to the Throne it was thought absolutely necessary to do something at once to gain the confidence of the people, hence the creation of the Supreme Council. This had its immediate effect and I really gained the confidence of the people in one day. The reason why this action had such an immediate result was that it promised many desirable things.

Firstly, that the Royal Family is getting together and will work in harmony.

Secondly, that the King was willing to seek the advice of highly respected Princes who have had experience of State affairs and who have the confidence of the people, none of the HATED official class being included in this Council.

Thirdly, that the King's power to take arbitrary actions would be lessened by this Council (remember that in the present state of opinions in the country, the King is thought to be more liable to do more harm than good).

Therefore the immediate result of the creation of the Supreme Council had been very good, and I think that it has served its purpose very well and that my action was well justified. Since then, people have had time to reflect a little and the Supreme Council has come to be criticized a great deal. I will enumerate some of the criticisms and questioning about it.

1. People ask whether the Supreme Council is an advisory body or an executive body. Some think that the Council has too much power. I would answer that the Council is entirely advisory since it cannot carry out any executive actions at all. Its opinions have executive effect through the King alone. The way that the Council works at present is that it meets in the presence of the King and NEVER meets without the presence of the King except by special order. Questions submitted to the Council are all questions of policy, questions of national finance, appointments of high officials such as Ministers of State, questions of high and special rewards such as ranks of Chow Phya

the period, however, suggests that he was both less conservative and less powerful than has been generally supposed. The British Minister in Bangkok, in a despatch dated December 18, 1925, reported on a conversation with Prince Boriphat as follows (Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 260/78/40):

His Royal Highness finally touched on constitutional reform and said that it had been decided to inaugurate a sort of legislative assembly composed probably of Privy Councillors. It was necessary to go very slow to begin with, with a moderate and restricted programme which could be extended gradually so as to meet the new spirit which would be created by compulsory education. The Prince said he was determined not to be caught napping and to be in advance of, and not behind, public opinion.

In 1927 a new British Minister said of Boriphat, "He is anxious that Siam should not merely keep abreast but should actually be ahead of the times and is in favour of a more democratic form of government as soon as the people are fitted for it. In this he is more likely to go too fast than too slowly." Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 1903/1903/40 (January 28, 1927).

Similarly, the Thai archives of the period at times picture Boriphat as a 'liberal' relative to some of the other influential princes, and occasionally show him being overruled by the king or a 'conservative' faction.

and Grand Crosses (there has been abuse and backstairs influence in the past) and questions concerning tradition and important ceremonials. The King may also seek advice in personal or Royal Family affairs.

In any question that concerns any Ministry, the Minister responsible may be invited to attend the meeting.

The Supreme Councillors sit in the Cabinet Council and give their opinions. Final decision on important matters such as the promulgation of a New Law or the signing of a Treaty is always given in the Cabinet Council. Both in the Cabinet Council and in the Supreme Council the decision of the King alone prevails, although in the ordinary course of events, the King always adopts the opinion of the majority, but being still absolute he need not necessarily do so.

2. It is criticized that the Supreme Council being an advisory body should not sit in the Cabinet Council which is an executive body. I admit that this is quite true. This system is only adopted for the sake of convenience. It would make business much slower if the Supreme Council were not to sit in the Cabinet as any question decided on in the Cabinet will have to be deliberated on again in the Supreme Council. And since the King alone decides all questions, it does not seem necessary to introduce any complications at the present stage. If there is a Prime Minister to preside [over] the Cabinet Council and who will submit the decisions of the Cabinet to the King, then it would be well to have the Supreme Council as a separate body which the King could consult and then give his final decision. We will talk more of this later.

3. That there should be some law to indicate and regulate the duties of the Supreme Councillors. This is certainly needed, and a draft law has been drawn up, but owing to the conflicting opinions as to WHAT SHOULD BE THE DUTIES of the Supreme Councillors, I have shelved that draft for the present until a clearer idea of what is the best form to give to such a Council is forthcoming.

4. That the Supreme Council is approved of at this moment owing to the personalities of the Councillors, and that in the case when these Councillors are replaced by others, the Council would not have the confidence of the people. I think such ideas are rather pessimistic. If there are no more good men in the future, we can have no hope for Siam.

5. That the existence of the Supreme Council lessens the prestige of the King. I admit that this is true, but I consider that the prestige of Kingship in this country can hardly be lower than at this moment. I have already explained the causes I doubt very much whether the old prestige could ever be regained. I think that the evolution of the public opinion in Bangkok and [the] educated class has already gone too far, and that it would be a wild goose chase to try and get back any of the old glory. The King should be content to do all the good he can, even though the credit were given to somebody else. I believe that at the present time and with the sentiment of the people as it is at this moment, all credit will always go to somebody else to some Minister or some Prince, if there is no Supreme Council. If any thing goes wrong it would be attributed to influence of some wicked person and the foolishness of the King in being influenced by that person. People seem to have the idea that the King is a sort [of] nonentity who is easily influenced by anybody, and that he has no opinion of his own whatever. This statement may sound exaggerated, but it is really very near to the truth.

6. That the Power of the King is lessened. This is, of course, what is intended. As I have already said, the days of absolute power are numbered. The S.C. [Supreme Council] certainly lessens the King's power to do harm by the arbitrary actions, but surely, it does not lessen his power to do good as he ought to be supported very wholeheartedly by the S.C. in that case.

I believe that some of the reasons why the S.C. is so much criticized and feared now is some sort of sentiment of envy. Anybody who has the ears of the King is always hated. It also makes backstairs influence rather difficult, because the people will now have to go to 5 or more backstairs instead of one or two.

Having stated some [of] the criticisms against the present form of the Supreme Council, I would put the

5th Question What is the best form to give to the Supreme Council? Is it worthwhile to make it a permanent institution of the country, or should it be allowed to die a natural death?

d) The You have said in your article in the *Atlantic Monthly* Cabinet. that the Governmental system of Siam is in water-tight compartments.⁵ This is perfectly true, but I think that it is inherent to the system of having Ministers each responsible to the King alone. Each works for the benefit of his Ministry alone and not to the benefit of the whole. An attempt has been made to improve matters by having weekly meeting[s]. At least the Ministers meet once a week to discuss matters together, and I think that there has been a real improvement. But it would be better still if we were to have a Prime Minister to preside over the Cabinet. He should be allowed a fairly free choice of his colleagues, so that the Cabinet will work

5. The article referred to is Francis Bowes Sayre, "Siam," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1926, pp. 841-851; the particular passage cited is on page 844. This article deals primarily with the government administration, and particularly the legal system, describing conditions as Sayre found them in the last years of the Sixth Reign. After his return to Siam in the summer of 1926 Sayre wrote another, better-known article, "Siam's Fight for Sovereignty" (*Atlantic Monthly*, November 1927, pp. 674-689). In the final two pages of this article Sayre discussed the death of Rama VI and wrote approvingly of the economic and political changes instituted by Prajadhipok, concluding with the verdict that "Siam's star is rising." In an oblique but unmistakable reference to his talks with Prajadhipok in the summer of 1926, and particularly to the set of documents published here, Sayre said (p. 689):

Troublous constitutional problems still remain. His Majesty keenly appreciates the difficulties and dangers of absolute monarchy; he has a sincere desire to democratize the government and to shift part of its responsibilities to the shoulders of the people. But a parliament uncontrolled by an intelligent and interested electorate is a far more dangerous engine of tyranny than an absolute monarch; and, until the groundwork can be built by pushing forward the work of general education, the parliamentary form of government must wait. Programmes, nevertheless, can be formulated looking toward this goal; and in the meantime the King is hoping to develop the people's political experience by creating popularly elected municipal councils in some of the larger cities.

(There are comments on drafts of this article by King Prajadhipok and other high officials in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 19.1/4.)

well as an homogeneous body. The Ministers will be nominated by the King after having conferred with the Premier. I believe that this would be a real gain to the country. The Supreme Council will then act as a controlling body. I have already indicated the line in which work would be done under this system. The thing to decide is, whether this system should be used now or later.

6th Question Should we have a Prime Minister? Should this system be inaugurated now?

e) The Legislative Council. The question of having some sort of Legislative Council has been discussed many times. A sort of Legislative Council was created early in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. This Council consisted of Ministers of State and 12 nominated members. The Council remained in existence for about 5 years and since then has become a dead letter although some of the Councillors of those days are still living. I think that it was given up because it was felt that there was no real need for such a Council and that it only delayed the work of the Ministers.

When the late King came to the Throne, the Prince of Pitsanuloke⁶ recommended the formation of a Council of State similar to what existed in Russia at that time (not the Douma). I believe the matter was discussed in a Cabinet meeting, but the scheme was not adopted, owing to the opinion of Mr. Jens Westengaard who thought that any makeshift form of Parliamentary system would serve no good purpose.⁷

Prince Damrong has now submitted a new idea of a Legislative Council, composed of officials nominated from every Ministry. This Council will really work as a sort of Law drafting Commission. We have already got a Department for drafting laws, and I am not sure that the proposed Council would be able to do the work better. Rather the contrary I am afraid, and it will delay work too. Besides that, it may attempt to criticize the policy of the Ministers, and as the Councillors are officials in the Ministries appointed for a time only, the system may not be very good for discipline. The difficulty about such a nominated Council has always been the question of recruiting the members. At the present moment we cannot afford to pay the members, and we cannot get unpaid members.

7th Question Should we have a Legislative Council? What should be the constitution of such a Council. (I have received many petitions to form some sort of Council).

6. The late king was of course Vajiravudh, who came to the throne in 1910. The Prince of Pitsanuloke was Prince Chakrabongse, the eldest of Vajiravudh's four younger full brothers. Until his death in 1920 Prince Chakrabongse was regarded as the likely heir to the throne if Vajiravudh remained without male children, although under the Law of Succession promulgated after his death he would have been disqualified because of his marriage (which ended in divorce) to a Russian lady. Prince Chakrabongse had been educated in Imperial Russia, and after his return to Siam followed a military career, distinguishing himself as an able and energetic administrator.

7. Jens I. Westengaard (1871-1918), a professor in the Harvard Law School, had gone to Siam in 1903 as Assistant General Adviser to the government of Siam. In 1908, on the death of his predecessor, he became General Adviser. Upon his retirement in 1915 the title 'General Adviser' was discontinued and replaced by 'Adviser in Foreign Affairs.'

2. Financial Affairs

I will not say much about financial affairs as I do feel that I am not competent in the matter. I think that we have a very capable advisor in Sir Edward Cook.⁸

The one important question is the proper division of the resources available among the Ministries. I know that, in your opinion, we spend too much on the Defence forces. I am inclined to agree with you in this respect, yet the cutting down of expenditure on Defence is a very serious responsibility. Very few people dare advocate such a thing, as we have too many experiences of the swashbuckling policy of our neighbors.

I am getting the whole of our financial policy overhauled, but I am somewhat at a disadvantage in not [being] really competent in the matter.

8th Question Have you any opinion as to our financial policy?

3. Internal Affairs

The one change of importance that I am contemplating at this moment, is the organization of Municipal Councils. I think that, at first, these Councils should be nominated. Later on we might try Municipal elections. This would give some idea as to the possibility of inaugurating some form of representative government. It will satisfy the advanced opinions of the country, and will be a good demonstration as to whether the people are really ready to have an effective voice in the affairs of the country.

Another question which I consider important is the Chinese question. The Chinese are very useful in Siam. In former days they marry [married] Siamese women and became very good Siamese citizens. But since the Chinese revolution, there has been quite a change. Now the Chinese bring their wives from China, and are determined to remain Chinese. They organize schools in which they teach practically only the Chinese language. There is a rather disturbing state of affairs, as we lose a source of good and laborious citizens, and with the new ideas in China filtering through, it becomes a latent danger.⁹

8. Sir Edward Cook (1881-1955) served as Financial Adviser from 1925 to 1930, one in a long series of British officials to fill this post.

9. The various factors cited resulted in a perceived decline in the rate of assimilation of Chinese into Thai society in the 1920's, which coupled with a sharp rise in the numbers of Chinese emigrating to Siam in the early years of the Seventh Reign made the 'Chinese question' a major concern of Prajadhipok and his advisers, one consequence of which was the imposition of the first effective measures to limit Chinese immigration. Such a step had been considered before, particularly when Vajiravudh was writing of the dangers of a Chinese 'nation within a nation,' but always rejected, largely because of the belief that Siam's economic development was dependent upon Chinese labor.

While conditions led the government to impose measures that were the logical consequence of Vajiravudh's writings, the royal pronouncements of the Seventh

9th Question Can something be done to make the Chinese become Siamese as in the old days? (In the Straits Settlements they are willing to become British subjects.)

These are all the problems which we have not yet found satisfactory solutions or which are doubtful as to the proper way to attack. Others are being solved or on the point of being solved.

Reign were more akin to those of Chulalongkorn than to those of his successor. In a famous speech given in 1907 Chulalongkorn had said

It has always been my policy that the Chinese in Siam should have the same opportunities for labor and for profit as are possessed by my own countrymen. I regard them not as foreigners but as one of the component parts of the kingdom and sharing in its prosperity and advancement.

Prajadhipok, visiting Chinese schools in Bangkok in 1928, spoke to the same effect:

. . . a the Siamese and Chinese have lived amicably together for generations. I do not wish for anything better than that they should continue to live thus harmoniously for all time. . . . In your schools, you teach your students to love their motherland, that is, China; that is natural and quite right. But apart from teaching them to love China, I trust that you will also teach them to love Siam; for you who live in this country have received good treatment from the Government, and are given rights equal to the Siamese themselves.

พระราชดำรัสในพระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว (ตั้งแต่ พ.ศ. 2417 ถึง พ.ศ. 2453) a (Speeches of King Chulalongkorn, 1874 to 1910), Bangkok, 1967, p. 211; *Gist of a Number of Speeches Delivered by the King on His Majesty's Visits to the Chinese Schools in Bangkok in B.E. 2470* (Bangkok, 1928), pp. 2-3; texts in Thai, Chinese, and English.)

B. SAYRE'S MEMORANDUM

Saranromya Palace
July 27th 1926

May it please Your Majesty,

In the memorandum which Your Majesty was gracious enough to send me on July 23 Your Majesty asked me to reply to the following nine questions:

1st Question: Should the King have the right to choose any prince as his heir? If the King has this right, ought not this right to be extended to a Council of High Princes and Ministers of State in the case when the King dies without having chosen an heir? At present the King alone has the right to nominate an heir. It would be perhaps more logical to allow a Council of some sort to exercise that right when the King has not done so. This would be more consistent with the idea of an elected King.

2nd Question: Should the principle of choice be admitted at all, or ought the succession to be by birth alone, and ought there to be some amendments to the present law or not?

3rd Question: Must this country have a parliamentary system one day, and is really the Anglo-Saxon type of parliamentary government suitable to an eastern people?

4th Question: Is this country ready to have some sort of representative government?

5th Question: What is the best form to give to the Supreme Council? Is it worthwhile to make it a permanent institution of the country, or should it be allowed to die a natural death?

6th Question: Should we have a Prime Minister? Should this system be inaugurated now?

7th Question: Should we have a Legislative Council? What should be the constitution of such a Council?

8th Question: Have you any opinion as to our financial policy?

9th Question: Can something be done to make the Chinese become Siamese as in the old days?

In attempting to answer these questions I cannot but feel very humble. The solutions of the problems underlying the questions depend upon such an intimate knowledge of the internal affairs of Siam and of the personalities of her leaders that I cannot but recognize that there are others whose opinions must be worth far more than mine. Indeed my only excuse for venturing these opinions must be that Your Majesty has asked me to do so and that perhaps value can be found in the ideas of

an impartial and detached observer whose only object is to promote the welfare of a country he loves.

The answers to the above nine questions deal with a variety of subjects and perhaps can best be answered by dealing with each subject separately.

I. SUCCESSION TO THE THRONE

PRINCIPLE OF SUCCESSION

In viewing these problems one must realize at the very outset that the situation in Siam is totally different from that existing in Great Britain and other similar limited Monarchies. What works well in Great Britain might work disastrously in Siam. Siam should not slavishly copy the system of any Western nation, but should evolve out of her own experience what seems best adapted to her own genius and conditions.

In Great Britain the power of the King is so much limited and attenuated and he wields so little power that if an incompetent or corrupt King should come to the throne he could not do vital injury to the country. In Siam, on the other hand, the Monarch wields all power. In Siam if a King lacking in ability, in strength of character, or in integrity of purpose, should ascend the throne, he might easily make shipwreck of the country. At the least, he would be almost sure to do it tragic injury. It is therefore infinitely more important for Siam to have a competent and strong King than for any country like England.

It would seem to follow that although a country like England can afford to fix the line of succession to the throne by an absolute principle such as primogeniture, Siam, even were such a principle practicable, cannot afford to do so. Since it is absolutely vital that Siam should have a competent and able Monarch, since the welfare of Siam so directly depends upon the degree of competency and ability of her Monarch, it seems clear that Siam's welfare vitally and directly depends upon her being able freely to select as the Monarch the ablest, the most competent and the strongest of the Royal Princes. Any law which prevents such a freedom of choice and which therefore might necessitate the crowning of an incompetent or weak Monarch because he happens to be the next in line of succession, must make against the ultimate national welfare. In England, where the Premier wields the actual power of government, no one would tolerate the idea of following a fixed line of succession for Premiers, or of adopting any system which would rob the country of its complete freedom of choice. If the King is to continue in absolute power, Siam's future welfare would seem to depend upon her being free to choose for her Monarch the best man available among the Royal Princes, regardless of rank or age; unless Siam has this freedom she must expect to have from time to time Monarchs who are incompetent or weak, and the national interests will consequently suffer tragically. For these reasons I feel that there should be no hard and fast law of succession based upon rank, seniority, or any other absolute principle, but rather that the choice should be left free and unhindered so long as it falls upon a Prince of Royal Blood. In order to prevent undue pretensions from those scheming for personal self advancement, it would seem wise that the choice of the heir apparent should be limited to a son of some King and of a Queen of any rank or to persons of Royal Blood; presumably the choice should not be open to sons of concubines.

TIME OF CHOICE

It would seem to me that the choire of the heir apparent should be made before the death of the King. If the choice is left until after the death of the King, there is great danger that various factions will arise each backing its own candidate, and there is always the danger that this might lead to civil war. It is manifestly of the greatest importance that upon the death of the King, all the Royal Princes should be united and stand together in the choice of a successor. This would hardly be assured unless the heir apparent is chosen during the lifetime of the King.

BY WHOM THE CHOICE SHOULD BE MADE

I feel quite strongly that the choire of the heir apparent should not be left solely to the King, but that the choice should be made by the King with the advice and consent of the Privy Council. If the choice is made solely by the King, it seems to me that there will be a very real danger that a group of Royal Princes or Ministers may not believe in the wisdom of the King's choice, or may not concur in it. If this should be the case it would result in a lack of loyalty on the part of such Princes or Ministers to the person chosen by the King, and the result upon the death of the King might be disastrous. To give a concrete illustration of what I mean, the King might designate as his successor his newly born infant son. The most patriotic and ablest of the High Princes and Ministers might feel that Siam was at the time in such a critical position that a long period of regency would spell disaster for the country, and might therefore conclude that the only patriotic thing for them to do would be to put aside the infant child and instead place upon the throne a strong and able ruler. Should a considerable faction support the infant child, civil war might result.

In other words, my feeling is that the unquestioning loyalty of the Princes and Ministers to the heir apparent upon the death of the King is absolutely vital for Siam's welfare and that the only way to insure such loyalty is to give to the Privy Council a voice in choosing the heir apparent. I therefore feel that the action of His late Majesty in claiming the right to choose his successor alone and unaided, was exceedingly unwise and should not be followed.

It would seem that this choice should be made by means of a secret ballot. If there is to be an actual freedom of choice on the part of the Privy Councillors they must be freed from the embarrassment of having to give an open and non-secret vote possibly not in accordance with the wishes and desires of the King. The only way to insure real freedom of choice is by secret balloting. Presumably it should require more than a bare majority to choose the heir apparent. The concurrence of three quarters of those present within the Kingdom might well be required so as to guard against the possibility of a substantial proportion being disloyal to the heir apparent.

A further question arises as to whether the choice of the heir apparent should be made by the Privy Council or by the Council of High Princes and Ministers of State. If the foregoing ideas are sound, it would seem clear that the choice should be made by the body which is most truly representative of the various and diversified interests of the Kingdom and which most nearly reflects the opinion of the controlling people. This would seem to be the Privy Council. Also, if the

Premier form of Government as suggested below is adopted, the choice clearly should be made by the Privy Council, for, since the Council of High Princes and Ministers of State is so small that the Ministers form a majority of the group, a scheming Premier could absolutely control the choice of the heir apparent by compelling the Ministers to vote for his own choice. This would not be possible in a body as large as the Privy Council.

PROVISIONAL NATURE OF THE CHOICE

Conditions are continually changing. Children are born, boys come to age, certain individuals die, some, through the course of time prove weak or incompetent, and others gain strength and prove their worth. It therefore seems important to me that the choice of the heir apparent should not be irrevocable. I should like to see the choice made a provisional one which could be freely changed as conditions change. I should suggest that the King and Privy Council consider the question of choosing the successor to the King afresh at intervals of every five or ten years; that at the end of every such period the new conditions should be given consideration, and the best man as viewed in the light of that time should then be chosen. This choice should be regarded in the light of a purely provisional choice rather than of an appointment. Clearly there should be no actual appointment and no official announcement should be made. Neither should additional rank be given to the person chosen. Otherwise his position should a different man later be chosen, would be too hard. The suggestion of making the choice purely a provisional one would have the additional advantage that no one could feel secure that he would ascend the throne upon the death of the existing King. The position of the heir apparent is a very difficult one. He becomes surrounded with men seeking to flatter him in order to gain his good opinion and thus to acquire power when he comes to the throne. Conditions all seem to tend in the direction of warping his character and thereby rendering him less fit later to perform his duties as King. If no one could feel secure in the position of heir apparent and if the choice were recognized as an entirely provisional one, it seems to me that it would be advantageous from the view-point of shaping the character of the person provisionally chosen as the heir apparent.

If the newly elected King should die before his successor has been chosen, then it would seem best to follow out the same principles, i.e. the Privy Council should meet and choose from the Royal Princes freely and without restriction whoever seems to them best fitted and most competent to carry out the duties of the King.

The foregoing suggestions, it would seem to me, are those best calculated to secure the most competent and ablest man for the Kingship. It would probably also lessen the likelihood of regencies which are apt to be exceedingly dangerous in a country like Siam, where absolute power is vested in the King.

Therefore, for all these reasons, my answer to the 1st and 2nd questions which Your Majesty proposed are as follows:

The King should have the right to choose any Royal Prince whatever as his heir, but not without the advice and consent of the Privy Council. This suggestion, as Your Majesty intimated, would be more consistent with the idea of an elected King, and would very greatly strengthen the position and influence of the new King.

If these ideas are sound, the present law of succession should be dropped and a new fundamental law in accordance with these ideas should be framed and promulgated.

II. FRAMEWORK OF GOVERNMENT

I do not think that it is practicable to consider at this time the organization of a popular representative parliament in Siam. A workable parliament is absolutely dependent upon an intelligent electorate. Without intelligent control by the people such a body would be sure to degenerate into a corrupt and tyrannical body. Until the rank and file of people in Siam have generally received a higher degree of education than at present it would seem therefore to be exceedingly dangerous to try to set up a popularly controlled parliamentary body. It therefore seems inescapable that at least for the present absolute power must continue to rest in the King.

Absolute Monarchy can never be free from the great and vital danger of an incompetent or weak King. In the hands of an enlightened Monarch, such as King Chulalongkorn, rapid progress can be made and national interests can be greatly advanced, but if an incompetent or weak Monarch comes to the throne all the progress of a former reign may be lost and the country may be faced with the dire alternative of disaster or revolution. Anything which will help to prevent such disastrous abuse of power will tend to promote the ultimate welfare of the Monarchy.

Viewed from this light the system of government by a Premier would seem to have distinct advantages. In the first place, if the actual work of government is committed to a Premier, if corruption creeps into the government or if intriguers or self-interested cliques manage to obtain the reins of power, as long as the King remains sincere and is accessible to others, the Premier can always be removed and the group of intriguers upset, whereas a King cannot be removed. In other words, in every country there should always be held in reserve some power other than revolution, to remove one who proves himself in actual practice unfit for the carrying on of the government, and in a country like Siam this reserve power logically should be exercised by the King. By the transfer of the detailed work of government from the shoulders of the King to those of an appointed Premier, Siam would achieve a reserve power which would make possible through peaceful means the removal of whoever proves unfit to do the work of government; and in this way, the country would gain a guarantee against incapacity and possibly tyranny on the part of the one carrying on the actual operations of government.

In the second place, the system of government by a Premier has the advantage of allowing a complete freedom in the selection of the one responsible for the carrying on of the government. The person thus selected need not be confined necessarily to Royal Blood, nor to Kingly rank, but can be selected with absolute freedom with a view solely to ability for the work of government. The work of carrying on the government may be placed upon the shoulders of whoever of all the men in the Kingdom is best fitted for the task by reason of his integrity, his strength of character, his executive capacity, and his ability to translate desired policies into practical achievement.

A third advantage in the system of Government by a Premier is that under a Premier the work of the separate Ministers can be more easily

unified and co-ordinated. During the last reign one could not but feel that much was lost by a lack of co-ordination among the separate Ministers, and in those fields of work which spread beyond the sphere of any single Ministry progress was often hampered or entirely blocked. It is the duty of a Premier to formulate the general policies to be followed by the Government and to unify the work of all the separate Ministries so as to attain those desired policies. A Premier can be thus accessible in a way which is not open to a King. Many of the difficulties of the late reign were due to the fact that His late Majesty was not freely accessible to those actually carrying on the work of the government, and he therefore often made decisions based upon opinions gained from a single self-interested clique which did not make for the welfare of Siam. Because those who care most for Siam and who exercised wise judgment frequently could not reach him, he frequently failed to know the truth underlying the situations with which he dealt, and therefore acted in ignorance sometimes with regrettable results.

A fourth advantage of the system of Premier Government is that it allows a division of work. Upon the King falls the inescapable duty of performing innumerable ceremonials, all of which require time and strength. Upon the King also must fall the decision of all questions of large national policy,--a task exacting the best of any man's time and strength. Problems involving the family affairs of the Royal Family also fall upon the King's shoulders, as well as innumerable other duties which no King can escape. These responsibilities are more than sufficient to consume the full time and strength of any one man. If to all these is added the weighty burden of carrying on the actual work of Government and deciding the multitudinous and endless minor questions which the conduct of government unforgivingly requires, the burden becomes too great for any single man to bear. The work of actual government is strenuous and exhausting,--far more so than most people realize. If all this work is thrown upon the King in addition to his other grave responsibilities and burdens, either he will break under the strain during a course of years, or else he will be compelled to neglect, through sheer physical incapacity, reading many State papers which the one responsible for the government ought to read and seeing many people which such a man ought to see. It is almost inevitable that he will become tired and discouraged and in time fall into the hands and under the power of an intriguing, clever group scheming for their own self-advancement instead of for the welfare of Siam. This was not true in the early days when the task of government had not assumed such large proportions as it does to-day, and when the work of government was simple and comparatively easy. As the work of government becomes more and more complex, however, the time will soon come, if it has not already done so, when no single man can possibly perform all the Ceremonials which the King must perform, properly decide large issues of national policy, settle questions arising in the Royal Family, and in addition at the same time carry on the arduous and strenuous work of detailed government.

For all these reasons it would seem manifest that the King should be relieved from the hard work of government and that this should be instead placed upon the shoulders of a Premier appointed by the King. Such an arrangement does not mean that the King would be shorn of his power. The ultimate power would still rest with the King. It would mean that the King would place upon the Premier the responsibilities for carrying on the government and that the Premier would always be responsible to the King. The King would be relieved of much of the detailed burden of government, but questions of large policy would still be referred for decision to the King.

Under such a scheme it would be vital and essential that all responsibility should be concentrated in the Premier. He therefore should alone have the power of appointing the Ministers of State, who would be responsible for the conduct of the work in their Ministries directly and immediately to the Premier. All questions should go from the Ministers directly to the Premier. Under such a scheme it would seem vital that the King should not himself select or choose any of the Ministers. If he did so the Premier could not be made responsible for the work of the Ministers thus chosen. Responsibility in such a case would rest rather with the King, whereas the whole underlying conception of government by a Premier is rather to concentrate responsibility in the Premier so that for any and all mistakes or errors in the work of the Ministries the King can blame and hold entirely responsible the Premier under whose control and direction the work is carried on.

There is one danger which must be faced under such a system. It is possible that the Premier might seek to absorb so much power that he would become a rival or even overshadow the King, as was the case, for example, with the Shoguns in Japan. Although this is a possible danger, I do not feel that it is a very real one under the conditions existing in Siam, unless indeed the King should be so manifestly incompetent or unfit for his duties that he ought to be stripped of power. If the Premier seemed to be scheming for personal power the King could of course always remove him. If, nevertheless, such a danger were felt to be real it might be guarded against by various possible methods. For instance, the Ministry of War or of National Defence might be placed directly under the King and therefore made entirely independent of the Premier. In this way the King could keep direct control of the Army and see that only officers loyal to him were appointed. Under such a scheme the Ministry of War would have to be separately budgeted for and entirely separated from the other work of government. In my opinion, however, such a precaution as keeping the Army out of the control of the Premier would under the conditions now prevailing in Siam be unnecessary.

I quite realize that there are many difficulties which must be faced in creating a form of Government by a Premier. Both the conception of making the various Ministers responsible to the Premier instead of to the King and the idea of the Premier or a Minister resigning because he personally disagrees with the policy advocated by his superior although he is well qualified for his post and entirely acceptable to his superior are quite foreign to the ideas at present generally prevailing in Siam, and would have to be developed cautiously and with care. Nevertheless, both of these ideas must be thoroughly learned before Parliamentary Government can be achieved, and if, as I hope, Siam will one day achieve some form of Parliamentary Government, these prerequisite ideas must first be mastered and generally understood by the people. If these first steps to Parliamentary Government must be mastered some day, I see no reason why they should not be mastered now.

Very much, of course, depends on personalities. Is it possible at this time to secure someone competent and willing to undertake the infinitely important task of accomplishing this transformation and carrying on the Government as Premier? The programme to be followed vitally depends upon the answer to this question.

In answer to the 3rd and 4th questions proposed by Your Majesty, my answer is that Siam I hope some day may have a parliamentary form of government, but that the country is not yet prepared for representative government. I believe that those who are shaping the destinies of Siam

should not lose sight of a representative form of government at some future time when the spread of education makes this possible, for I believe that some such form of Government is inevitable and desirable with the growth of education and widespread intelligence among the population. Whether or not the form of government should be the Anglo-Saxon type of parliamentary government is a question which need not be decided at this time. My own hope is that Siam will never become completely Westernized but will retain in her development her own individuality. Her institutions, governmental and otherwise, should not be blindly copied from Western nations, but should be the result and outgrowth of her own genius and experience.

THE SUPREME COUNCIL

The creation of the Supreme Council at the beginning of Your Majesty's reign was to my mind a masterstroke. By creating a Supreme Council endowed with high power and by placing upon this the five ablest and strongest men of the Kingdom, every one of them of unquestionable integrity and patriotism, Your Majesty struck at the very root of the intrigue and underground scheming which had been going on before Your Majesty came to the throne. The result was the gain of immediate confidence on the part of the people of Siam and a great strengthening of the position of the Monarch. In my own opinion the functioning of the Supreme Council has amply justified its creation, and personally I do not feel that as long as it keeps free of intrigue it should be allowed to die a natural death. It seems to me that there are very distinct functions which the Supreme Council can fulfil under the Premier scheme of government which I have been suggesting.

Although the Premier should carry on the entire work of the government, large questions of national policy cannot fail to keep constantly arising, and these will have to be referred for decision to Your Majesty. Many of these must be questions which from their very nature should not be decided single-handed and without help by anyone. Your Majesty will doubtless wish to secure the advice of a few of the wisest men of the realm. Such questions might well be referred by Your Majesty to the Supreme Council for their advice and suggestion, always reserving the power of final decision to Yourself. In other words, my conception of the functions of the Supreme Council under such a scheme of government would be that it should form a purely advisory body to which the King might turn for advice on question[s] of large policy. It should have nothing whatsoever to do with the executive work of government. Presumably the Premier should be a member of the Supreme Council, so that the person charged with the actual conduct of the government could have the benefit of the advice and views of the members of the Supreme Council. On the other hand, no member of the Cabinet other than the Premier should sit in the Supreme Council. It should be kept sharply distinct from the Cabinet and should be confined purely to the giving of advice direct to the King on questions of policy.

I realize that criticisms have been made concerning the functioning of the Supreme Council, many of them unjust, yet some of them not perhaps without foundation. To my mind the advantages of the Supreme Council outweigh the objections to it. It serves as an effective preventative of backstairs influence which must always be an everpresent danger in [an] absolute Monarchy. It provides for an effective avenue by which outside opinion may reach the ears of the King, and thus

enable him the better to understand and appreciate the truth underlying any given situation. It gives to the King the benefit of the wisdom and experience of the ablest men of the Kingdom.

On the other hand, it has its dangers if its powers are not strictly confined to the giving of advice and if its advice is not strictly confined to question[s] of policy. There will always be the danger that the very eagerness of its members to correct abuses will lead it to interfere with the work of the various Ministries and thereby to detract from the concentration of responsibility which should center in each of the Ministers. If the Supreme Council once begins to encroach upon the executive fields of government by interfering with the conduct of work in the separate Ministries, by advising as to appointments to be made under the rank of Minister of State, or in any other way taking part in the executive functions of government, it will thereby at once lessen the efficiency and increase the difficulties of every Minister. This must be an everpresent danger unless the powers of the Supreme Council are strictly confined and limited solely to the giving of advice and to the giving of advice on questions only of policy. Questions of appointments should presumably be left to the free discretion of the Ministers.

Again, as long as the members of the Supreme Council sit in the Cabinet, there is the danger of their forming a clique within the Cabinet. The Cabinet members will be ignorant of whether or not any issue under discussion in the Cabinet has already been discussed in the Supreme Council, and the members of the Cabinet will consequently be likely to feel that they are often acting in the dark. May there not be a danger that many of the Cabinet members will simply watch which way the members of the Supreme Council vote, and will cast their vote accordingly, instead of exercising an independent judgment and feeling a real sense of responsibility? It seems open to considerable question whether the Supreme Council, if it is to perform its most useful functions, should not be kept entirely separate from the Cabinet and the members thereof except the Premier refrain from sitting in the Cabinet meetings.

In answer to the 5th question put by Your Majesty my answer is that in my judgment the Supreme Council should be continued as a permanent institution of the country, but that its power should be carefully defined by law and should be limited to the giving of advice and to giving such advice only on questions of underlying policy. I believe it should be separated from the Cabinet and should act entirely independently of that body. It should keep rigorously free of interfering in executive matters.

In the 6th question, Your Majesty asks whether we should have a Prime Minister and whether such a system should be inaugurated now. I have already given the reasons why I believe that Siam should have a Prime Minister. I also believe that the system should be inaugurated now. If such a fundamental change is to be made, it would seem far easier to make it at the beginning of a reign when new policies are being formed and new paths are being blazed than later on when the conduct of government has become settled in fixed channels and when restricting obligations have grown out of troublesome situations or troublesome personalities. If a change such as this is to be put into force, it would seem best to do so at the beginning of a reign so that the King can devote fresh energy and many years to the gradual moulding

of the system into the most efficient form of government which can be evolved to meet the distinctive conditions and need of the country.

It may be argued that there is at present no need for such a change, since under Your Majesty's wise guidance with the assistance of the Supreme Council the government in Siam at the present time is entirely satisfactory. I cannot feel the force of such an argument. While it is quite true that the present government of Siam is functioning well, when one takes a far look into the future one must reckon with a popular demand for some parliamentary or more popular form of government. This necessitates the making at some time of fundamental changes, and if progress demands these changes, surely the time to make them is when a competent and wise Monarch is on the throne, assisted by able and patriotic leaders.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

The question has been asked whether or not Siam should have a Legislative Council. I hope that some day it will be possible to form a popular and representative legislative body charged with the framing of the laws; this seems to me highly desirable and ultimately inevitable. As already suggested, however, I do not feel that the rank and file of the people in Siam are at present sufficiently educated and interested in public affairs to make the formation of such a body possible at this time.

Furthermore, I see very little advantage in the formation of a legislative body or council composed of representatives from each of the Government ministries. It seems questionable whether any useful purpose would be served by such a body other than that which is already being performed by the Cabinet and by the Department of Legislative Redaction, and such a council might add infinitely to the delay in securing the passage of new laws. Until the time when a law making body can be elected by the rank and file of people and be thus directly representative of the population as a whole, in my opinion the formation of a legislative council would probably serve no useful purpose.

On the other hand, I can see a decided advantage in finding some method for making possible the interpolation [interpellation] of government Ministers. If the policy of any Ministry is misunderstood by the people generally, as long as it is an honest policy the Minister ought to welcome the opportunity of explaining and defending the policy so as to disarm and silence criticism. If on the other hand, the policy is due to intrigue or adopted for selfish reasons the method [of] interpolation is often the best way to bring the matter to the attention of those at the head of the government. If it is possible therefore to secure a representative body which will represent popular opinion, I would like to see such a body given the power to put questions to the Ministers of Government. Such an outlet for popular opinion would form a kind of safety valve and do much to prevent such popular opinion from becoming by reason of its suppression dangerous. If the system of Municipal Councils in the various cities proves practicable, it might later become possible to create a body containing one or more representatives from each important city with the power thus publicly to interpolate the Ministers. This is a matter, however, which should probably be left as to details until a later time when the success of the Municipal Councils has become assured. In the meantime it might prove advantageous to allow the members of the Supreme Council to

interpolate the Ministers at a meeting presided over by the King. Under the Premier system of Government if the members of the Supreme Council could thus call the Ministers to account, it would serve as an effective check against the corrupt use of power by Ministers appointed by an unscrupulous Premier. It would also serve to reduce to a minimum misunderstandings between the Cabinet and the Supreme Council, for the quickest way to prevent misunderstandings is frank and full discussion.

In reply therefore to the 7th question proposed by Your Majesty, I am not in favour of creating a Legislative Council, but I should suggest the giving of serious consideration to the later formation of some body representing popular opinion which should have the power to interpolate Cabinet Ministers, and until such time the giving of this power to the Supreme Council.

III. FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

In the 8th question Your Majesty asks whether I have any opinion as to Siam's financial policy. Since I am not a financial expert, I think I should leave such [a] question for the advice of a man like Sir Edward Cook, who is far better equipped than I to advise on the financial policy of Siam. Nevertheless, there are one or two matters concerning which I feel rather strongly, but upon which because they are quite unrelated to the other subjects of this Memorandum, I shall speak very briefly.

Siam, in my opinion, should not be so largely dependent upon a single crop. In the case of unfavourable weather conditions and a consequent shortage or failure of the rice crop, it means that Siam suffers unduly, and is sometimes placed in a temporarily precarious financial position. It does not seem wise to place on [all] one's eggs in a single basket. I therefore sometimes wonder whether Siam ought not to take steps to engage in the cultivation of some secondary crop, such as tobacco. I have been informed that there is no reason, so far as climatic conditions are concerned, why tobacco should not be produced in Siam and that it could be produced in the off seasons between the rice crops. Why should Siam not profit, as Java has done, from large tobacco crops? Not only would this diversify Siam's crops, but it would of course considerably increase the national production and the consequent revenues of the government. Similarly, there seems no reasons [reason] why Siam should not grow hemp and other similar products.

Might not more assistance also be given to efforts to obtain the sowing of a more standard and better rice seed, and thus to standardize the rice produced in Siam and to improve the quality of the crop? Again, might not the fisheries be protected and the production of fish thus increased? I believe that certain kinds of fisheries are now being injured through lack of protection. With proper fish protection and an efficient Fishery Department not only could this injury be stopped but the amount of fish available for food actually increased.

The idea which I am trying to suggest is that the production of Siam should be stimulated and increased in order to increase the prosperity of the country. All this would seem largely dependent upon the efforts of the Department of Agriculture, but that Department, of course, is helpless to undertake such activities without adequate funds. Inasmuch as the future prosperity of Siam depends largely upon the stimulation and increase of her agricultural resources, does it not

seem that perhaps a greater proportion of the revenues of the Kingdom should be allotted to the Ministry of Agriculture than at present allowed? Might not a similar remark be made with regard to the Ministry of Education, whose work again vitally concerns the future development of Siam? The thought in the back of my mind with regard to the question of financial policy is the fundamental problem of whether it might not be wise to reconsider afresh the proportion of revenues allotted to each Ministry in the light of the future hope of Siam.

During the year B.E. 2467 [1924/25] out of a total national expenditure of Tcs. 96,452,497.00 the expenditure of the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture was only Tcs. 4,177,709.00 and of the Ministry of Education only Tcs. 2,640,344.00. Should not the allotment of revenues as between the different Ministries be freshly considered and determined more in accordance with what will make for the greatest prosperity and strongest Siam of the future?

The 9th question which Your Majesty proposed is whether anything can be done to make the Chinese become Siamese as in the old days. This is a matter of such far reaching importance that I do not feel that I ought to venture an opinion as to it without considerably more study than that which I have been able to devote to it in the two days since Your Majesty's questions were put to me. I should like before coming to any definite conclusions to discuss further with Your Majesty certain underlying problems of policy upon which this question must ultimately depend.

In order to put into concrete shape some of the ideas which I have expressed to Your Majesty, and in compliance with Your Majesty's desire, I have put into the form of a preliminary draft of a short constitution the framework of the government discussed above. I am sure that Your Majesty will understand that this is not intended in any sense as a finished document but merely as a hastily prepared starting point upon which to base later discussions.

Signed/ PHYA KALYAN MAITRI
(Francis B. Sayre)

OUTLINE OF PRELIMINARY DRAFT

ARTICLE I

The Supreme Power throughout the Kingdom shall be vested in His Majesty the King.

ARTICLE II

The King shall appoint a Premier who shall be responsible to the King for the entire executive work of the Government. He may be dismissed by the King at any time.

ARTICLE III

The Premier shall appoint and may remove on his own responsibility the Ministers of State at the heads of the various Government Minis-

tries. He shall be responsible to the King for the entire work of each Ministry. He shall also be charged with the duty of carrying out the general policies of the Government as directed by the King and of coordinating for this purpose the work of the separate Ministries.

ARTICLE IV

Each Government Minister shall be responsible directly to the Premier for the work of his own Ministry. He shall assist in carrying out the general policies directed by the Premier.

ARTICLE V

The Cabinet shall be called together and presided over by the Premier, and shall be composed of all the Ministers of State. It may discuss matters of common interest, but the responsibility for all decisions shall rest with the Premier.

ARTICLE VI

The Premier will refer to the King for decision all questions of large general policy. In all matters he shall be subject to the direct control of the King.

ARTICLE VII

The King shall appoint a Supreme Council of five members. The Premier shall be a member ex officio, but no other Cabinet officer shall be a member. The Supreme Council shall exercise no executive power whatsoever. Its function shall consist solely in giving to the King when called upon to do so advice on questions of general policy or on questions other than the detailed executive work of the Government. It shall have no power to advise as to appointments nor as to details of administration. It shall however have the power to interpolate the Premier or any Cabinet officer.

ARTICLE VIII

The King shall appoint and may remove at any time the members of the Privy Council.

ARTICLE IX

Within three days of ascending the throne the heir apparent shall be provisionally chosen by the King with the advice and consent of the Privy Council. The choice shall be limited to sons of a King and a Queen or to those of Royal Blood, but shall not be otherwise limited either by rank or seniority. The choice of the heir apparent shall not be irrevocable, but shall be freshly made by the King with the advice and consent of the Privy Council at the end of *each five-year period thereafter*. (Note: Or perhaps a period longer than five years may be desired.) Should the King die before any choice has been made, the heir apparent shall be chosen immediately after the King's death by the Privy Council. In all cases three quarters of the members of the Privy Council then within the Kingdom shall be necessary to elect.

ARTICLE X

The judicial power, subject to the supreme power of the King, shall be vested in the Supreme or Dika Court and in such inferior Courts as the King may from time to time create.

ARTICLE XI

The supreme legislative power shall rest in the King.

ARTICLE XII

Changes in this fundamental law may be made only by the King with the advice and consent of three quarters of the members of the Privy Council.

C. PRINCE DAMRONG'S MEMORANDUM

[In a draft covering letter (in Thai) from Prince Damrong to King Prajadhipok, dated August 1, 1926, Prince Damrong says that he is submitting his views in English so that they can be read by Sayre without going to the trouble of having a translation done. He adds that he realizes that his English grammar is imperfect but that nonetheless he hopes that Sayre can follow his argumentse

The text printed here is taken from a copy of Prince Damrong's third draft of the Memorandum. Copies of the first two drafts are also in the file.]

MEMORANDUM

1. I have carefully read His Majesty's memorandum, as well as that of Phya Kalyan. I have nothing except endorsement to express regarding H.M.'s memorandum, but to P.K.'s [Phya Kalyan's] memorandum, while admiring the exposition of his views and agreeing to it in some parts, I regret to find myself differ from him in others. But time allowed to formulate my answer is short, and the handicap in my case by having to express my views in English instead of Siamese, compels me to write only briefly. However the proposals made by P.K. in his memorandum are of two kinds; namely, proposal on matters to be promulgated immediately and proposal on matters to be given further considerations. I will only comment on the former.

2. The most important proposal, as it seems to me, is to change the system of administration of the Kingdom by the appointment of a Prime Minister with the power of selection and dismissal of ministers of state, and with the sole power to formulate policy and direct the administrations of the Kingdom, subject of course to the consent of the King and the shadow of a control by the Supreme Council of State. I am bound to admit my limitations both in the studies and the knowledge of the administrations of European countries. My impression is that a Prime Minister is indispensable in parliamentary government, but in a country where absolute monarchy prevails such as, for example, Russia, Turkey, and Persia, the system did not seem to do much good without a strong monarch, nor indeed able to save [save] a weak monarch from his ruin. But I repeat again that I do not consider myself competent to judge matters of European nature, so I will confine my comment entirely to what I think would affect Siam and the Siamese.

3. First of all I will consider the general impressions that it would likely make in the country, because a Prime Minister such as proposed by P.K., or, indeed, a Prime Minister in the European sense, is an unknown function in Siam, and to create one is an innovation that would naturally give rise to all sorts of conjectures. Plausible explanation may of course be written in the preamble of the decree, but would it be possible to convince the people? The fact that the King has appointed another person, whom they do not respect as much as the King himself, to govern the country in his stead, will most naturally

make them ask, why? Is it because the King does not care to do the work as a King should do, or that the Supreme Council, seeing that the King is too weak to rule, persuaded him to appoint a Prime Minister? In either case the authority and the prestige of the King would suffer in the eyes of the people. The innovation may be applauded [applauded] by some Westernized Siamese, but how many are they comparing with the whole people of Siam? In short, I am of opinion that the innovation would create a general unfavourable impression in the country. One must not forget that general impression means much in this country, as it has already proved by the result of H.M.'s first act in creating the Supreme Council of State.

4. I will now consider the likely effect that the innovation would take upon the ruling class, taking the effect already seen by the creation of the S.C.S. [Supreme Council of State] as a standard of judgement. It would in all probability create 3 kinds of sentiment, i.e.,

(A) Those who applaud [applaud] and [are] willing to support the innovation, either by conviction, or by allowing loyalty to the King to override their conviction, and those who applaud because they expect personal benefit from it.

(B) Those who are indifferent and sceptical, either because they have no interest of their own to concern, or being opportunists simply awaiting to profit themselves out of whatever result it may bring.

(C) Those who oppose it either by their own conviction, or by personal jealousy, or having profit or interest to lose by the innovation.

In fact no matter what system of government is adopted it can never give universal satisfaction, and there [are] bound to be divisions of sentiment something similar to what I have said. The only thing to be hoped for is that the proportion of favourable sentiment be the majority, which I do not think would be the case in the appointment of a Prime Minister as proposed.

5. H.M. rightly stated in his memorandum that he has received [a] deplorable inheritance when he ascended the Throne, because the authority of the sovereign had fallen much in respect and confidence, the treasury was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the government was corrupted and the services more or less in confusion. It was the master's stroke of H.M. in the creation of the S.C.S. immediately after his accession that instantly restored the general confidence in the Throne. Now let us look at the composition and the working of the S.C.S. The Council is a committee of five persons of repute and experience preside [presided over] always by the King in person, and every resolution passed in the Council is executed by the King alone, no member of the Council is ever mentioned in any act, nor has any of them interfered with the work of ministerial departments, and yet accusations are not wanting, that the Council has usurped H.M.'s authority and power, and also trying [has tried] to interfere with the ministerial responsibility. I am glad indeed that H.M. himself refuted these accusations in his memorandum. But the fact that mischievous accusations are capable of being made against a Council of five persons (perhaps I may be allowed to call of high repute) is enough to make one realise what difficulties a Prime Minister alone would have to face against all sorts of intrigue, while on the other hand he is being held responsible for the good administration of the country. Here one discerns the necessity

which may arise that a Prime Minister would be obliged to resort to stratagems, good or bad, in order to keep his position or otherwise throw up his appointment altogether.

6. Now I come to the person and the responsibility of the Prime Minister. No doubt H.M. will select the best qualified person in the Kingdom as his first Prime Minister, and let us presume that the selection meets with universal approval. The first impression created by the appointment of the Prime Minister would be that he is expected to improve the administration in such a way that will give entire satisfaction to the public. Should he fail to realise general expectations however unreasonable, he would always stand to have censures heaped upon his head which would make it extremely difficult for a Prime Minister to maintain the public confidence for any length of time. Moreover the Prime Minister, however wise and able he may be, has to carry on his work with the approval of the King as well as loyal support and competent assistance of the ministers of state. How is he to be assured of it? It is indeed proposed that the Prime Minister should have the power of removal and selection of ministers. But such powers have always been considered to belong to the King alone, and considered to be the mainstay against personal intrigue of others. It will be a great difference between the King exercising those powers in the S.C.S., and permitting the Prime Minister to exercise them with his approval. If the King's own backstair[s] is considered obnoxious, what would it be to have another one of the Prime Minister? Let us suppose that nothing I have said would happen. Now if the Premier considers one or more ministers of state incompetent, who would he select to replace them? Naturally he would select those whom he has confidence in [as regards] ability as well as loyalty towards him. Here we may discern the element of party government introduced into Siam but without parliamentary control; such element could easily tend to be a government by faction.

7. The relation between the Sovereign and the Prime Minister is also most important and most delicate matter. It would be utopian to expect that the King and the Prime Minister would always see eye to eye, or indeed that every Prime Minister would have the same degree of favour and confidence of the King. If the King wants to dismiss a Prime Minister, he would have to find [a] convincing reason for so doing, but in the absence of [a] parliament who is to furnish the convincing reason that protects H.M.'s decision from being considered unjust and arbitrary? The dismissed Prime Minister naturally would not proclaim his own faults, and he, being a great man, may have more or less admirers who agree with him, and here we see the element of official opposition being introduced into Siam, and again without parliamentary control. But the worse [worst] would happen when the King wants to dismiss a Prime Minister and he has the general support of the people, even in Bangkok alone.

8. There is another thing which in Siam is still different from European countries where the system of government by Prime Minister existed. In a country like England or France where government changes according to the will of parliament, or even Russia in the old days when ministers were often changed according to the will of the Monarch, in those countries they have organised departments of Civil Service in which the permanent officials run the work; the minister only directs the policy, so a change of a minister does not affect the works [work] of the department. Now in Siam, at present at any rate, and I am of the opinion that for some time to come yet, the minister is the backbone

of the ministry he presides [over]n The organization as well as the work of a department are still visibly affected by the competency of the minister. That is why even without constant changes of the minister it is difficult to find a real[ly] competent man as head of a ministerial departmentn If a ministerial post becomes unpermanent before a thorough organisation is made in the ministries in the same way as in European countries, I am afraid local discipline will also break down, because instead of looking to one chief all the time, speculation as to a coming chief would constantly arisen It may be argued that the Prime Minister is expected to cure all those imperfections, but from the nature of things existing in this country as aforesaid, can one man do it? It may be argued again that the answer could be known only if we give the idea a trialn But why run the risk of a trial for the sake of an idea when there is no necessity.

9. I do not wish it to be understood that I think parliamentary government and the system of government by having a Prime Minister are forever unfit for Siam. I only maintain that both are unfit and undesirable in the condition and circumstances which now exist in Siam, and the result would be disastrous even if the system of government by a Prime Minister alone is adopted now. What Siam urgently wants at the present moment is to remedy the evils [that] existed before H.M. came to the Throne, and to organise an efficient administration of the Kingdom before anything else. In this respect H.M. himself has done a great act, which can never be overpraised, by the creation of the S.C.S., and himself working with it loyally and arduously with the satisfactory results, that confidence in the Government has beenre-established, and the national budget balanced, and put a stop of official embezzlement and irregularities by removing undesirables from offices and putting in competent men to do the work of reorganisation of the administrationsn One should not forget that all the good works accomplished by H.M. were done within the last ten months, and there are many more works to be done, and "Rome was not built in a day." Even if the innovation is introduced I doubt whether it can accomplish more rapidly, not to say, or better. I am an old man and may be considered naturally conservative, but with sincere conviction I beg leave to ask that what fault or drawback the present system has shown, so as to endanger the safety or retard the progress of Siam, if it is allowed to continue? Is there any apparent and convincing necessity which requires radical modification? If the benefit of the present system is found to exist no longer or has been compromised, I do not think any member of the S.C.S. would hesitate to remedy it even with its own dissolution, but if the S.C.S. is still considered useful, I beg to warn that the appointment of a Prime Minister as proposed, and no matter what the proposal may provide for, the S.C.S. is bound to be extinguished in so far as its usefulness is concerned even within the lifetime of the old men who now serve in it.

10n H.M. has done me a great and gratifying honour by mentioning my name in his memorandum among the first and firm supporters of his idea in the creation of the S.C.S. I did so because I was absolutely convinced that such [a] council alone would be practicable for the successful administration of Siam under the present circumstances. If I remember rightly I have also expressed my opinion to H.M. even then, that I do not think a system of government by Prime Minister would do in Siam. It was therefore a sort [source?] of pride and satisfaction to me to see the results of H.M.'s creation of the S.C.S., because itn made me feel that I was not wrong in giving him my support, and I wish H.M. to know that it was a real pleasure to me when sitting in the

Council to see and feel that everyone of its members from the King downwards discard[ed] all personal ambitions and work[ed] together solely for the benefit of Siam.

11r As regards the impracticability of having a parliamentary government in Siam till the people are sufficiently educated to understand their responsibility in the election, I entirely agree with P.K. and think that he is absolutely right. I would only add that either when the institution of the S.C.S. is found wanting in usefulness, or when the time approaches that H.M. is considering the creation of the parliamentary government, then the question of government by Prime Minister should be taken up for consideration.

12. As regards making municipal institution[s] the starting point for representative government I need not comment in this memorandum, because it was also a subject which I agreed with and supported H.M.'s idea before he came to the Throne just the same as I have supported his idea of the creation of the S.C.S.

1st August 1926

II. DEMOCRACY IN SIAM

Introduction

From early in the reign, King Prajadhipok had discussed possible constitutional changes aimed at making the monarchy less absolute and introducing a measure of representative government (see I). His first important act as king was the creation of the Supreme Council of State, which while limited to high members of the royal family was nonetheless a significant step away from one-man rule and towards collective leadership by a royal oligarchy. In 1927 came a second major constitutional change--and the last actually effected before the *coup* of June 1932--the establishment of the Committee of the Privy Council.^d

The Privy Council itself had existed since the days of King Chulalongkorn but had long since ceased to perform any significant function, membership in the Privy Council having become a symbol of royal favor that carried with it a certain prestige but no real role in the government. At the beginning of the Seventh Reign there were well over 200 Privy Councillors, all with princely or high official titles. King Prajadhipok wished to experiment with an advisory council which would be larger and more representative than the Supreme Council of State or the Cabinet Council, but the Privy Council as constituted was considered too large and unwieldy to serve this purpose. Thus early in 1927 the king appointed a committee of nine, headed by Prince Boriphat, to consider the creation of a new and smaller body.

The memorandum "Democracy in Siam" was written in response to the deliberations of this committee. While the only copy of this document that has yet come to light is unsigned and undated,^e there is convincing evidence that the author was Prajadhipok himself. (See Note at the end of this introduction.)

The Committee of the Privy Council, as it finally came into being on November 30, 1927, was an appointed body of forty members with quasi-legislative functions. Its powers were very limited, but nonetheless had been the subject of considerable controversy. After the

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1. The account of the Committee of the Privy Council given here is based on the extensive documentation in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 6(องคมนตรี)/2-25.

These materials are also the basis of an important article (in Thai) by Chai-anan Samuthwanich devoted largely to the formation of the Privy Council Committee (pp. 1-40 in *Sat Kan Muang*, Bangkok, 1971). However, Dr. Chai-anan does not mention the memorandum "Democracy in Siam" (which as noted below is not in the Royal Secretariat records), and even some of the documents in the Royal Secretariat files would appear not to have been used. For additional comments on Dr. Chai-anan's article see the review of *Sat Kan Muang* by the present editor in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, 62:2 (July 1974).

2. The copy is in the National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 42/67 (เสนาบดี/ปรึกษาร่างพระราชบัญญัติองคมนตรี; Cabinet/Discussion of the draft Privy Council Act).

committee headed by Prince Boriphat had already finished its deliberations on the draft law establishing the new body, Prince Sithiporn,³ who was a member of the committee, submitted a letter dissenting from the majority opinion. Prince Sithiporn drew a distinction between a 'consultative' and an 'advisory' body, the difference being that a 'consultative' body could meet only when summoned by the king, whereas an 'advisory' body could in certain circumstances meet on its own initiative. Prince Sithiporn argued that the absolute monarchy was suited to the conditions of Siam and popular with the public, and would be necessary for a long time to come, and yet that if the proposed new body were to be at all a step in the direction of democracy, and to have any potential for restraining a possible abuse of power by a bad king, it should be an 'advisory' rather than a 'consultative' body. Thus he proposed an amendment to the draft act which would allow the Privy Council Committee to meet on questions important to the national welfare without being first summoned by the king.

Prince Boriphat seemed unimpressed with Prince Sithiporn's arguments, but King Prajadhipok personally ordered the committee reconvened to consider Prince Sithiporn's proposal, which he deemed "very important." In "Democracy in Siam" the king endorsed a modified form of the proposed amendment, in which 15 members of the Privy Council Committee could request that a special meeting be held, the monarch having the power to approve or deny the request.

The committee met again June 20, 1927, and voted 6 to 3 in favor of making the new body 'advisory' rather than 'consultative.' The majority included Prince Boriphat and Prince Sithiporn, while the dissenting group was led by Prince Dhani, who at an earlier meeting of the committee had expressed doubts as to whether the democratic system developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries constituted a "World Axiom" universally applicable, and whether patriarchal rule were not better suited to Eastern peoples. The amendment as finally agreed upon was similar to that proposed by the king, but with the number of signatures necessary to request a meeting reduced from 15 to 5, the change being made not so much to encourage freer discussion of national issues as for fear that a large number of signatures on a request would be taken as a sign that a major issue was at stake.

The change from a 'consultative' to an 'advisory' body had no practical effect, but the debate on the question led to an illuminating expression of opinions on Siam's political future.

Another issue which aroused considerable discussion was the basis upon which members of the new body would be selected. The king himself wrote a lengthy memorandum on the question, in which he suggested the possibility of naming unofficial members, citing as an example 'Nai Lert,'^r an entrepreneur who had built a business empire based on Bangkok's largest bus company. (Though known as 'Nai,'^r or 'Mister,' 'Nai Lert' in fact held the awarded title of nobility 'Phya.') It was decided however that the time had not yet come for representatives of commerce, and the forty finally chosen consisted of members of the

3. M. C. Sithiporn Kridakara was variously a government official, businessman, politician, and editor, and--above all--a farmer and for nearly fifty years the most important figure in the development of Thai agriculture. For a brief account of his career see the review article by the present editor in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, 61:1 (January 1973), 302-309.

royal family and officials of 'Phyað or 'Chao Phyað ranko. A writer in the newspaper *Siam Observer* doubted "Whether it would have been possible for anyone to get together a more representative number of men in the Kingdom that matter," while the British Minister reported that "The first forty are a strange medley of the less influential princes, ex-Ministers of State and minor officials, past and present."⁴ The *Bangkok Daily Mail* particularly regretted that no officials of the Ministry of Agriculture were included, but some thought that agricultural interests would be adequately represented by the presence of Prince Sithiporn, although his official career had been in the Ministry of Finance.⁵

In his message to the first meeting of the Privy Council Committee, the king traced the origins of the Privy Council to the Fifth Reign, and observed that as the number of members had increased during the Sixth Reign their meetings had become more cumbersome and less frequent, and "the results of their discussions were not of great importance." In creating a new and smaller body, the king said, "Our predominating desire is to experiment in and cultivate the art of debating as practised in large assemblies so that whenever the time shall be ripe for a change in the method of government it will then be an easy matter to effect such a change."

The new body was generally well received, more stress being put on its potential for development than on any expectation of immediate significance. One Bangkok paper saw the creation of the Privy Council Committee as "an exceedingly important incident in the history of Siam, and one that will be regarded with deep interest by historians, for from it it is certain there will spring much of the future progress of the country." The real significance of the innovation, it was said, "lies in the fact that it is a foundation for the creation of a body invested with wider powers that at some later time will interpret more closely the voice of the people."⁶

The Committee of the Privy Council, however, did not evolve into a more powerful or more representative institution. Instead it led a useful but unspectacular existence of four and a half years devoted mainly to making relatively minor revisions in the drafts of laws, such as a new family act or certain small tax measures, which the government considered suitable for submission to public discussion. Despite the prediction of the American Minister that "any differences of opinions will be so expressed as not to prevent the final coalescence of minds

4. *Siam Observer*, September 9, 1927; Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 8176/7777/40 (September 13, 1927), Waterlow to Chamberlain. The British Minister continued, ". . . in any case, it is hard to see what real part such a body can play in the work of government. But its existence may for a time stop the mouths of those who clamour for representative institutions. It can hardly cause the Government any inconvenience or constitute a check on an autocratic monarch, as it can discuss nothing without His Majesty's sanction, and therefore can always be ignored."

5. *Bangkok Daily Mail*, November 29, 1929; National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 6/3.

6. *Siam Observer*, December 2, 1927. (This newspaper article and those referred to in notes 4 and 5 are in the files of the Royal Secretariat.)

into a unanimous vote,"⁷ there were in fact genuine divisions of opinion and questions decided by votes, but the issues at stake were not of major importance. Immediately after the 1932 *coup* the Committee of the Privy Council was abolished, along with the Supreme Council of State.

Although its role was not great, the Committee of the Privy Council was among the various institutions of the period of absolute monarchy the one which most closely resembled the later National Assembly, and it is perhaps significant that many of the top leaders of the government and the Assembly of the early constitutional period were former members of the Privy Council Committee.

The greater part of "Democracy in Siam" is devoted to the question of whether or not a democratic system of government was or ever would be suited to the conditions of Siam, and the conclusions reached are generally negative. The belief that Siam was not and for a long time would not be ready for democracy was held by almost all important government figures of the period, as illustrated by the writings of the king, Sayre, and Prince Damrong in I, and by Prince Dhani's and Prince Sithiporn's opinions cited above. Similarly, a report submitted in 1927 (also the date of "Democracy in Siam") by a committee of Thai officials and foreign advisers studying a draft law for the suppression of 'Communist' and 'Bolshevik' doctrines said in part:⁸

However the Committee were of the opinion that new legislation should not be confined merely to the suppression of those doctrines and theories which are inherently connected with violence and revolution. There is another danger in Siam, to wit: unwise and premature agitation for changes in the form of government. In the process of time there may be a general desire for some form of popular participation in government or some restraint upon the power of the Sovereign. The great bulk of the people of Siam however are as yet not trained in political or economic thought. There is not now nor will there be for a considerable time to come any possibility of fundamental change in the Government of Siam. There is a danger accordingly that agitation of a political nature would lead to unrest and possibly premature attempts to secure some changes in the constitution of the country. The question presents real difficulties.

The quieting of any such agitation for radical constitutional change is one of the arguments King Prajadhipok puts forward in favor of the

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7. United States, Department of State, Despatches from Siam, 892.02/9 (May 22, 1928); Mackenzie to the Secretary of State. The American Minister had sent some newspaper clippings on the new Privy Council Committee, and the Department of State had asked for the Minister's opinion on the change referred to in the clippings, "which appears to be one of some importance."
 8. "Report of the Committee on the Prevention of Communism, Bolshevism and Other Dangerous Propaganda," p. 3, in the National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 42 (เสนาบดี)/87 (เวียงมอชเชวีก). The committee consisted of Raymond B. Stevens, Prince Bowaradej, R. Guyon, and Phya Thepwithun. On Stevens, see VII; Prince Bowaradej, an older brother of Prince Sithiporn, was an army officer who was subsequently Minister of War, then the central figure in a major cabinet crisis in 1931, and finally, in 1933, the leader of the 'Bowaradej rebellion'; René Guyon was a French legal adviser in the Ministry of Justice; and Phya Thepwithun was a high Ministry of Justice official who subsequently served as Minister in the constitutional period. The report is in English and was probably drafted by Stevens.

establishment of the Privy Council Committee, and he adds that if the experiment fails perhaps the public can be persuaded to abandon any further demands for a democratic system. While there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of this argument based on expediency, it should be noted that the king was writing for conservative high officials and attempting to get their support in embarking on what appeared as though it might be a fairly drastic innovation in government. It would not be surprising if the king chose to stress the argument most likely to produce a sympathetic response. In addition to this rather negative reason, the king makes two more positive points in favor of establishing the proposed body--that it may serve as a useful training ground for the day when it becomes necessary to introduce a greater measure of representative government, and that it may serve as a restraining influence against a possible abuse of power by an absolute monarch.

One unusual point in the memorandum is the prediction that the Chinese, with their money, would inevitably control any parliamentary system in Siam. This has apparently not happened, perhaps because of the relative weakness of the National Assembly and political parties in most periods since 1932.

NOTE: The argument for royal authorship is based upon both internal and external evidence. Internally, a number of considerations point to the king as the author: The memorandum is in English, which was common in Prajadhipok's writings, especially those on political questions--even his political writings in Thai were full of English phrases--and the style is similar to that of other of his writings (see his "Problems of Siam" in I). The references to English history and political practice are also typical of Prajadhipok, and the discussion of the dangers of an unlimited absolute monarchy is reminiscent of that in "Problems of Siam." The various references to the changes and experiments the author would like to introduce in Siam also suggest royal authority, and it is practically impossible to imagine anyone but the king himself writing and circulating among high officials the assertion that the only way to deal with a bad king is to "chop off his head!" Finally, the phrase in the note at the end about the Privy Council in Siam resembling that of England "only in name" occurs again in King Prajadhipok's message to the inaugural session of the Privy Council Committee.

The internal evidence alone makes it highly probable that this document is by Prajadhipok, but in addition three pieces of external evidence may be cited. In the same file of the Damrong Papers in which "Democracy in Siam" is found there is a letter (in Thai) from Prince Damras Damrong, one of the royal secretaries, to Prince Damrong, dated July 6, 1927,⁹ saying that the king has given orders to send various enclosures concerning the proposed Committee of the Privy Council, including a "royal memorandum" (พระราชบัญญัติ). The file, however, which totals 92 pages of documents, contains nothing by the king other than some margin notes on a draft of the Privy Council Committee act--unless the king wrote "Democracy in Siam." Secondly, in another section of the archives, the Seventh Reign Royal Secretariat records, there is a letter from Prince Boriphat to the king, dated July 8, 1927, sending a report of the work of the committee Boriphat headed. In a handwritten

9. The king's instructions for this letter and the original draft are in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 6/4e

note (in Thai) attached to the letter, dated June 10, Prajadhipok discusses the committee's work and Prince Sithiporn's proposals concerning the Privy Council Committee. The king then goes on to say that he has a personal opinion on which he would like the committee's views, and that he is sending a memorandum which, for the sake of speed, clarity, and convenience of composition, he has written in English.¹⁰ The Royal Secretariat records do not contain such a document, but it is almost certainly the "Democracy in Siam" found in the Damrong Papers. Finally, the minutes of the June 20, 1927, meeting discussed above attribute to the king the proposal (said to be in English) that the number of members necessary to request a special meeting be 15, which corresponds to the figure suggested in "Democracy in Siam" and thus provides additional evidence that the king was the author.¹¹

If the argument for royal authorship is admitted, the date can also be established. Prince Sithiporn's proposals, which are discussed in "Democracy in Siam,"¹⁰ were submitted June 7, and hence the memorandum must have been composed between this date and June 10 when Prajadhipok's note was written.

10. National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 6/3.

11. The minutes of the meeting are in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 6/4.

DEMOCRACY IN SIAM

The question whether a democratic form of government is suitable, or ever will be suitable, for Siam or not, has been discussed among the intelligentsia of Siam for a long time, and is even now being discussed by the semi-educated people, some of whom having aired their opinions in the Siamese press. The general consensus of opinion is that Siam is not *at present* ready to have a democratic form of government, but may have to adopt it at some distant date. Some people assert that parliamentary government will *never* be suitable for the Siamese people, giving as reason that it is only the Anglo-Saxons who have been able to make a success of that form of government.

There is no doubt that a democratic form of government requires a high degree of development of the people to be a real success. It is even possible that there must also be certain racial qualities (which the Anglo-Saxons possess to a high degree) if democratic institutions are to be really beneficial to the people as a whole and to be *really* and *truly* democratic, not only in form, but also in fact. Too many democracies are so only in form.

Now I am also inclined to think that a real democracy is very unlikely to succeed in Siam. It may even be harmful to the real interests of the people. One could readily imagine what a parliamentary form of government would be like in Siam,¹ and there is no need to go into details. I shall just mention one fact, that is the parliament would be entirely dominated by the Chinese Party. One could exclude all Chinese from every political right; yet they will dominate the situation all the same, since they hold the *hard cash*.

Any party that does not depend on Chinese funds cannot succeed, so that politics in Siam will be dominated and dictated by the Chinese merchants. This is indeed a very probable eventuality. One could easily find many arguments to support the idea that Siam ought *not* to have a parliamentary form of government. This being the case, one may ask "Then why think about democracy at all?" The answer is that one must remember that the majority of people do not think *rationally*, but think only sentimentally. This is particularly true of the crowd. There may come a time when the Siamese people will clamour for a parliament. (Are there not signs of that even now in Bangkok?) It would be of no avail to explain, even with the best of reason, that a parliamentary government is not suited to the racial qualities of the Siamese! They will surely yell louder that they are being oppressed by a tyrannical ruling class, and there may be some trouble. (At the present moment I do not believe that there is any Siamese who would sacrifice his life for a political faith.)

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1. Vajiravudh actually wrote a short satire "Rathasapha nai Anakhot" (รัฐสภาในอนาคต; The Parliament of the Future) on an imagined Thai assembly, in which members shout and interrupt, give interminable, irrelevant speeches, etc. It has been reprinted in Sulak Sivaraksa, editor, *Nangsua Sanuk* (หนังสือสนุก), Bangkok, 1965, pp. 95-104.

Perhaps some countries have adopted democracy merely as a necessity, knowing full well that it does not suit the character of the people. That is why there are countries who *play* at having parliaments. It seems to me that it is quite on the cards that we shall have to *play* that sort of game in Siam *sometime*. It is with these considerations in view that I am now considering certain reforms.

It seems to me that, if it is admitted that some day we may be forced to have some form of democracy in Siam, we must prepare ourselves for it gradually. We must learn and we must educate ourselves. We must learn and experiment so as to have an idea as to how a parliamentary government would work in Siam. We must try to educate the people to be politically conscious, to realize these [their?] real interests so that they will not be misled by agitators or mere dreamers of Utopia. If we are to have a parliament, we must teach the people how to vote and how to elect representatives who will really have their interests at heart.

The reorganization of the Privy Council is an attempt to carry out the first step of these ideas. It will be said that the Committee of the Privy Council as reorganized will not really represent public opinion in general, and that as a body it will not really be representative of the interests of the people. This is, of course, quite true. It is firstly intended to be an experiment and an education in methods of parliamentary debate. I believe that the experience to be gained will be useful. The body may possibly reflect something of the general public opinion, and I do not think that it will be entirely useless. It is to be expected, however, that the creation of this body will not satisfy everybody, and that it will be variously criticized. (I do not believe that it is possible to do anything or organize anything without being destructively criticised by a certain section of the people in Siam.)

The next step in our education towards democracy would be the organization of municipalities. This will be a means of teaching the people how to vote, and the experiment would also prove useful and instructive. It will certainly be better for the people first to control local affairs before they attempt to control state affairs through a parliament. I sincerely believe that if reforms are gradually introduced in this way, a democratic form of government could possibly be introduced without too much harm. But the process must be very gradual and carefully administered in doses. If the experiments fail at every step, then it may be possible to persuade the people that democracy is not for Siam. The danger lies in impatience.

Another question which has also occupied the minds of all thinking men in Siam is the danger of unrestrained absolute power of the King. Absolute monarchy, like democracy, may become harmful at any time, because both principles rely on the perfection of human nature, a very frail thing to depend on. A sound democracy depends on the soundness of the people, and a benevolent absolute monarchy depends on the qualities of the King. It is unfortunately a fact that *every* dynasty, however brilliant, will sooner or later decay, and the danger of having some day a bad king is almost a certainty. I believe that every method has been tried so as always to obtain a good king on the throne, and every method has developed some flaw. The method of elected kings seems to be sound in principle; yet it produced some of the worst tyrants, i.e. some of the Caesars of Rome.

The alternative method used is to chance on having a bad king and make some institution that could control him.

This method also fails occasionally, as in the case of King Charles I of England, but on the whole it has worked fairly well.

I most earnestly desire to organize some institution which will serve to restrain any arbitrary or unwise actions of the King in Siam. (I presume that nobody will want to restrain his good actions?) I feel that if I succeed in evolving something really useful I would have done a great service to my country and the Dynasty.

The question is, what institution shall we organize now, admitting that the parliamentary system is impossible for the moment?

Perhaps the new Committee of the Privy Council could be made to serve that purpose in a small way? This is the reason why I think Mom Chao Sithiporn's opinion is of some interest.² I should like, however, to suggest a slight modification. A clause could be added to or after Article 13 saying that--"If fifteen members of the ³ make a written request to the President of the Committee, asking the President to submit to His Majesty the King that certain matters are of importance for the general welfare of the country and the people and that His Majesty should be graciously pleased to allow the matters to be discussed by the Committee, the President shall submit a petition to His Majesty, asking for a Royal sanction to hold a meeting to discuss the matters.⁴ It is understood that the King may grant the permission to hold the meeting or not as he thinks fit. (It is the right of veto recognized by all democracies. The King can also dissolve parliament.) I think that in this form, it is quite admissible and is much better than to grant a general right to a non-elected body to hold a meeting at any time. I believe that it will be able to fulfil its purpose of being a deterrent to those in power from acting arbitrarily or against the interests of the State. Anybody in power would hesitate to refuse such requests, unless he has very good reasons. Of course, a perfectly unscrupulous man may possibly refuse the request. But then with such a man, no institution *could* prevent him from doing bad actions, not even a parliament (cf. Charles I), and the only thing to do then is to chop off his head!

Thus the formation of this Committee may possibly serve two useful purposes (however imperfectly):--

1. As a means of experimenting and learning in methods of parliamentary debate.
2. As a restraining influence against misuse of power.

Note: It should be noted that the English translation of ¹ as Privy Councillors is somewhat misleading, as our Privy Council, particularly as reorganized, will resemble the English Privy Council only in name. There is no intention of imitating the British Privy Council. We must try and evolve our own Political Institutions and not merely copy others. That is why I believe in making experiments.

2. See explanation in the introduction to this section.

3. Committee of the Privy Council.

III. THE PACE OF REFORM

Introduction

In 1927, on the occasion of Chulalongkorn Day--the October 23^r anniversary of the death of King Chulalongkorn--Prajadhipok arranged for the publication of Chulalongkorn's now famous speech on administrative reform, with a foreword written by Prajadhipok himself. The speech is a lengthy account of traditional Thai administration and the plans of King Chulalongkorn to reorganize the government bureaucracy into functional ministries. It was given in 1888, but remained unpublished until 1927 and apparently virtually unknown. Prajadhipok indicates that he had first seen it only three years previously, and even Prince Damrong, who was almost certainly present when the speech was originally given, and who was the leading Thai historian, with a special interest in the Fifth Reign, appears to have forgotten about it. When the speech was sent to him before publication, he replied that it was an important document for the history of the Fifth Reign "containing much information that I didn't know before, and just learned through reading this speech."¹

That King Prajadhipok, who seldom wrote for publication, would personally write a foreword for a speech of Chulalongkorn is not surprising. Prajadhipok, and to an even greater degree the influential advisers around him, believed that for all his abilities Vajiravudh had not been a success as a king, and the writings from the beginning of the Seventh Reign are full of references to the administrative and financial problems of the previous reign (see I). While at times expressing doubts as to whether it were really possible, Prajadhipok sought to restore the prestige of the government and the monarchy, reversing the decline which had become apparent under his elder brother by returning to the spirit, and in some cases even the personnel, of his father's reign. Only days after Prajadhipok came to the throne, the British Minister in Bangkok was reporting that the new reign "may best be described as 'a return to Chulalongkorn,'" and early in 1926 he wrote, "The note struck by King Prajadhipok is economy, simplicity and accessibility. His intention is to return as far as possible to the golden age of his father, King Chulalongkorn. Although he appears to have been fond of his late Brother, everything he says and does is in fact the exact opposite of what King Rama said and did."²

In his foreword, Prajadhipok praises at length the 'revolution' in the system of administration carried out by Chulalongkorn, and emphasizes particularly that Chulalongkorn was successful because he correctly judged the pace of reform, going neither too slowly nor too

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1. Letter (in Thai) of Prince Damrong, dated October 11, 1927, in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 99/28i This file contains the original draft of the foreword in Prajadhipok's hand.
 2. Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 78/78/40 (December 3, 1925), iGreg to Chamberlain; F 847/78/40 (January 29, 1926), iGreg to Chamberlain.

quickly. Prajadhipok calls on the successors of Chulalongkorn to "follow in his footsteps," and adds that on the crucial point of the proper timing of changes they will need not only intelligence but also luck.

The references to Japan are a reflection of a widespread belief among the leadership of Siam that there were significant parallels in the recent histories of the two countries. With the exception of the somewhat ambiguous case of China, Japan and Siam were the only two independent countries in Asia during the period, and special similarities were seen between the 'Record Reign' of Chulalongkorn and the Meiji Era in Japan; not only were they virtually identical chronologically (1868-1910 in Siam; 1868-1912 in Japan), both were periods of rapid and successful change instigated from above, and both were subsequently looked back upon as something of a 'golden age' when traditional societies had been transformed into modern states and the immediate political threat from the West turned back. However, Prajadhipok is not altogether accurate in saying that in Siam, unlike in the case of Japan, this transformation was carried out "peacefully without unrest." The changes of the Fifth Reign did "affect adversely the interests of some groups," and the results could be dramatic. In one instance in 1874-1875 a split in the ruling Bangkok elite ended with the 'Second King' seeking asylum in the British Consulate, while in 1902 rural discontent, caused in part by the reorganization of Siam's internal administration and the consequent extension of Bangkok's effective control--outward from the center towards the fringes of the empire, and downward from provincial centers to the district and village level--erupted in short-lived but violent rebellions in the North, the Northeast, and the South.

The text of Prajadhipok's foreword is taken from พระราชดำรัสในพระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวทรงแถลงพระบรมราชาธิบายแก้ไขการปกครองแผ่นดิน (King Chulalongkorn's Speech on Government Reform), Bangkok, 1927r. This work has since been republished, while slightly variant versions of the foreword alone have recently been reprinted in Prince Dhani, *Chumnum Niphon*, pp. 6-8, and in Sulak Sivaraksa, editor, *Nangsu Sanuk*, pp. 105-108. There is an English translation in the *Bangkok Times*, October 24, 1927r.

FOREWORD OF KING PRAJADHIPOK

Upon my last return from Europe, in 1924, King Vajiravudh felt that I had reached the age when I should study the traditions of government and administration in order that I be prepared to carry out the duties of royalty. Therefore he ordered Chao Phya Mahithon to bring important documents setting forth principles of government for me to read and study, in accordance with the old royal tradition.

Among the documents which Chao Phya Mahithon brought for me to read was King Chulalongkorn's speech on reform of the government administration, which I have had published in this volume.

Upon reading this speech, I felt that it was an extremely important document. It left me more convinced than ever of the wisdom and virtues of King Chulalongkorn, and further increased my already great love and respect for him.

This speech was drafted with the utmost care, and shows clearly that King Chulalongkorn had great understanding and broad knowledge in traditional Thai government, and had also studied European administrative practices and knew the principles thoroughly. The speech, therefore, is a document which provides an excellent insight into the government of Siam.

In addition, this speech demonstrates clearly that as the basis in considering all his actions King Chulalongkorn thought only of the happiness of his people and the well-being of the country.

The change from the old system of administration through the establishment of the twelve ministries must be considered a major change, which can be called in ordinary speech 'Phlik Phaen Din' (พลิกแผ่นดิน), or if we use English the word must be '*Revolution*', not '*Evolution*'.

Very few countries indeed have been able to succeed in carrying out a major change like this peacefully without unrest--in fact one can almost say none. Japan also underwent a 'Phlik Phaen Din' change in administration, but not peacefully as in the case of Siam; there had to be disturbances in the country, such as the Satsuma Rebellion.

That Siam was able to undergo a '*Revolution*' in the system of administration without the shedding of even a single drop of blood must be considered miraculous and extremely fortunate for the country. A change like this is likely to affect adversely the interests of some groups, and thus it is extremely difficult to carry out peacefully.

That this change was successfully and peacefully carried out in Siam was because our '*Revolution*' was initiated by the king, and a king who both ranked above all his contemporaries in ability and also had a noble character which inspired loyalty in persons of every rank who came into contact with him.

King Chulalongkorn both saw the future clearly and knew the past well. He considered his programs very carefully, selecting with great

wisdom from both Thai and foreign methods of administration. He carried out the changes in the administrative system in a series of gradual steps completely *appropriate to the situation and appropriate in timing* --not too slow, and not too fast.

We who are members of the royal family and loyal officials, remembering constantly the beneficence of King Chulalongkorn, should determine in so far as possible to follow in his footsteps, and should try to see the future but should also look back to the traditions and principles of the past. These two things are not too difficult--the hard part is to choose the proper timing, neither too late nor too soon. This is extremely difficult, and requires not only intelligence but good luck as well. But if we work honestly and to the best of our ability we can say that we have tried to do our duty to the limit of our strength.

I hope that this volume will be instructive to those who receive it and will meet with general approbation.

PRAJADHIPOK

Amphornsathan Throne Hall,
Dusit Palace
12 October 1927

IV. NATIONALISM AND CHANGE

Introduction

If King Prajadhipok and his advisers were advocates of moderate and cautious change, adopting modern technology and experimenting with certain new institutions but insofar as possible preserving traditional Thai values (see I-III); there were in Thai society other groups favoring much more radical change. These groups maintained that many elements of the old culture of Siam were hindrances to the country's modernization and development, and therefore must be discarded. One such group was Marxist in inspiration (see V); another, somewhat larger and much more influential, was composed of students educated in the West.

Although relatively few in number, the Western-educated students exerted an influence that was disproportionately large. Most were from wealthy and powerful families, either royally related or part of the official nobility. Upon their return to Siam they could expect to attain relatively high official positions at an early age. Their technical and professional skills were a source of power, and the prestige attaining to things Western gave additional weight to their ideas. The important role of students educated in Europe, and particularly in France, in the 1932 *coup* has often been commented on, although it should also be noted that most of the important leaders of the old regime had also been educated in Europe.

The article "Nationalism and Change" was published in *Samaggi Sara*, the journal of the association of Thai students in England, in December of 1928. Of all the students educated abroad, those sent to England formed the most influential group of the pre-1932 period. British interests were far larger than those of other Western powers in Siam, and British prestige was correspondingly higher than that of the other Western powers. There were close ties between the Thai royal family and England, and the sons of the most important princely and official families were usually sent to England to study. *Samaggi Sara* circulated in Bangkok, and articles from it were frequently reprinted in the Bangkok press. King Prajadhipok, an old Etonian, took a personal interest in the association of Thai students in England and its publications.

Despite the article's outspoken criticism of many aspects of Thai tradition, including the Buddhist religion, the Thai students in England were in fact regarded as moderates compared to some of those on the Continent, most particularly the group in republican France. (Prince Damrong, something of an anglophile as well as a royalist, once noted with satisfaction that no students educated in England had played a major part in the 1932 *coup*.) While the article does not explicitly discuss politics, a subject that Thai students abroad were well advised to avoid,¹ the social, cultural, and economic changes proposed clearly have implications for the political order as well.

1. Pridi, for example, was nearly recalled from France in 1926, in part because of his political activities. Pridi's father petitioned the king asking that he be

The text is taken from *Samaggi Sara*, in the Damrong Library, Bangkok, and from the *Bangkok Times*.²

allowed to stay, and Prajadhipok approved the request. The Thai Minister in Paris, Prince Charoonsakdi (an elder brother of Prince Sithiporn)^a had warned that Pridi and his group had radical political ideas; in a letter (in Thai) written early in 1927 King Prajadhipok, speaking through the royal secretary, made the following interesting comment:

This Nai Pridi is intelligent but inclined to be a little brash, as is common among the young. Once he enters the government in a responsible position he will probably work well, and I don't much believe that he will become a "serious danger to the government" as Prince Charoonsakdi has reported. If the government doesn't use him in a manner commensurate with his knowledge, then things might develop in an undesirable way.

(Translation by the present editor, in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, 61:2, July 1973, 188-189; the letter is in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 10.1/7.)

2. *Samaggi Sara*, vol. 6, no. 3, December 1928, pp. 1-4; excerpts reprinted in the *Bangkok Times*, February 4, 1929. The author was said to be "the editor," who at this time was Mom Chao Rajada (Sonakul?).

NATIONALISM AND CHANGE

[The article begins by raising the question of what the policy of Siam should be with regard to Western civilization, noting that some have advised that the Thai adopt the material side of Western culture while retaining their own Eastern spiritual heritage. The author, however, believes that material values must inevitably affect spiritual values, and hence that the attempt to adopt Western materialism while preserving Eastern spiritualism must ultimately fail.]a

. . . This idea of the divisibility of the human mind into idea-tight compartments is a fallacy. If we accept the material side of Western civilization, our spiritual outlook will be transformed. . . .

When we speak of the material side of Western civilization we are, of course, thinking mainly of the products of Western science. But we cannot pick out only the products and leave out the philosophy of science. We cannot, for instance, adopt vaccination and leave out the theory of evolution. In the West itself science has been exerting and is exerting a great influence on the theology and art. The materialism of Darwinism shook Christianity at its base. Einstein may cure this materialism, but he will not be able to restore to the Church its ancient authority.

The position of Buddhism in Siam at the present day is in certain respects different from that of Christianity in Europe in the pre-science days of the seventeenth century. Buddhism commits itself to no metaphysical speculation, and whatever science may claim to discover to be the truth regarding the origin and the scheme of the visible universe, Buddhism cannot be proved wrong and thereby lose its prestige. On the other hand, it lays down a set of rules of conduct by the observance of which a faithful follower will attain to true happiness. . . . So far so good. People have been content to accept unquestioningly the dogmas of authority. Individual reasoning was not encouraged in old Indian and Chinese civilizations. And it would not have mattered much if it had been. . . . In Siam we have Brahminism and Animism, both of which appeal entirely to the mystic within us. The tendency of education on Western lines is towards rationalism, and that is why few of the educated Siamese nowadays take Brahmanism and Spirit Worship seriously. They find that the less exciting rites of Buddhism alone are enough to satisfy the mystic within them. . . . If Buddhism is to have the same hold in the future as in the past, however, we believe that the method of teaching it needs an extensive reform, which, of course, means reforming the Church itself.¹ To mention just one example, does

1. A second *Samaggi Sara* article from the same period similarly called for a reform of Thai Buddhism, noting that "with the apathy shown to religion the masses have turned to recruit their morals from the foreign films, with disastrous effects" (quoted in the *Bangkok Times*, March 4, 1929).

In 1930 there appeared yet another *Samaggi Sara* article, entitled "Religion and the Huanok" ('Huanok,' literally 'foreign heads,' was the term commonly

anyone suppose that in twenty or fifty years' time, with the increase in population and the cost of living, the majority of the members of the monkhood can continue to live on the labour of the rest of the community, as they do now? Perhaps it is deplorable that a man should not then be allowed to live a life of cloistered contemplation when and as long as he likes at the expense of others, but then de Lessep[s], in cutting the Suez Canal let loose upon us a great many things from the energetic West which, judging from old standards are deplorable. . . .

Our literature of the old classical type has scarcely any future. At its best in the past output has been limited and stereotyped. Our poetry, like our music, has a superficial charm of its own, but it is a significant fact that those of us who are able to compare our poetry and our music with those of the West always admit our inferiority. A Genius may arise who will devise a means of touching our golden chords in a way essentially Siamese, but while waiting for him let us not be too proud to appreciate, to borrow and even to copy from Western cultural art.

Our old drama--the *khon* and the *lakorn*--is gone never to return, and in its place we have the cinema. The cinema is of immense educational value, and for better or for worse will be one of the most potent factors in transforming our customs and traditions. . . . Customs then can change, and sometimes change quickly, and the sooner we accept this fact the better. Everyone has heard of the Great *Plien-Thamnien*² Ceremony in the early part of H.M. King Chulalongkorn's progressive reign. We cannot picture anything more impressive and drastic. Yet even the most conservative at that time never murmured disapproval--at any rate we never heard that any did. Mr. Le May, in his book *An Asian Arcady*, deplores our lack of tradition.³ We differ from him. We see very little good in tradition. We are not in a position to be able to afford it. We think our adaptability is an asset and only wish we had more of it.

We do, however, have traditions. One of these is the Chinese one of blind reverence for parents. Education on Western lines will weaken this. The general adaptation of European sport will weaken this reverence further. . . . Our Siamese world to-day is not the same as that of, say, twenty years ago. The struggle for existence is fiercer and life a more serious business, and all this will be much worse in another twenty years' time. We can no longer let a boy loose in a temple as a *luk-sit-wat* or in a palace as a *mahad-lek*⁴ by way of giving him a good

applied to Thai educated in the West), acknowledging, with apparent regret, "that we of the younger generation are very far from being devout Buddhists," "indeed the post-war generation of Siamese are indifferent to religion. . . . Young Siam is indifferent to religion. Yes, Young Siam in general, not only Huanok" (quoted in the *Bangkok Times*, November 17, 1930).

2. 'Plien-Thamnien' is literally 'tradition-changing.' The reference is to Chulalongkorn's second coronation (1873), at which he commanded the abolition of the traditional practice of prostration in the royal presence.

3. Reginal Le May (1885-1972) was a British Adviser in the Ministry of Commerce and Communications and the author of a number of works on Siam. He replied to the criticism of his views in this article in a letter in the *Bangkok Times*, March 26, 1929.

4. 'Luk-sit-wat' were temple boys, and 'mahad-lek' were pages. Before the advent

education and a fair start in life. . o . We are of the opinion that the members of our educated class on the whole fail to pay sufficient attention to the changes in our social and economic conditions which are rapidly taking place. We think that it is time our educated bachelors take a leaf out of the Western bachelors' book and recognise the grave responsibility of marriage.

Another social and economic question for which a more rapid adoption of Western ideas is called for is that of the position of women. We suggest that we pass over that Western custom of chivalry to ladies as not worth adopting, being in reality quite useless to the women themselves and a little hypocritical on the part of the men, and at once to accept in full the principle of absolute equality of the sexes. Women should be educated to be not only the intellectual but also the economic equals of men. So long as they are fitted for the one calling of marriage only, so long will they be a drag on the progress of any modern nation. This ideal of equal opportunity for the sexes is far from being realised in the West itself, but since the War the Western women have made tremendous strides toward their emancipation. The gap between their attainment and that of the women in Siam is widening, not narrowing. The mental energy of the Siamese woman is quite as great as that of the man, so that to make an arbitrary distinction between the two would merely be holding on to a wasteful and antiquated custom.

The voice of reaction is often disguised as the voice of patriotism. The die-hard and the jingo are apt to imagine themselves better patriots than the radical and the pacifist. But in reality the love of one's country is an inborn instinct. . o .

Nationalism is patriotism gone wrong. It is good to love the place of our birth and to have a kindly feeling for the people of our race, but that is quite different from mistrusting foreigners and foreign ideas. In the past our ancestors had not been too proud to own the Indians and the Chinese their teachers. Why should we now be ashamed to own ourselves the pupils of Europe and America? The danger is not that we may change too quickly, but that we may change too slowly. . . .

England owes her present position not to the fact that she has been slower to change than other countries, but that she has been quicker. She is not too proud to follow the lead of America in putting a premium on efficiency and to transfer her allegiance to the 'business men.'

Nationalism came from the West, and it is an irony that our reactionary should adapt it as his most effective tool. Is this wisdom or blindness? Is this the discus or the lotus flower?

of a Western-style system of education in Siam, these were the two main paths by which a young man might receive an education and prepare for a profession.

5. The allusion is to the Thai saying เห็นกงจักรเป็นดอกบัว, literally, to mistake the discus for the lotus flower. The discus, a weapon, symbolized evil, while the lotus flower, a common feature in Buddhist art and ceremonies, represented good, whence the figurative meaning to confuse good and evil, or right and wrong.

V. A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF THAI SOCIETY

Introduction

Students in the West were one group questioning fundamental values of Thai tradition and offering a vision of an alternative society in the late 1920's (see IV); another was the followers of Marx and Lenin. The standard studies of Marxist-communist influence in Siam, and later Thailand, have dealt mainly with the post-World War II period, with some occasional discussion of the 1930's and particularly Pridi's economic plan (see IX).¹ Nonetheless, Marxism and communism had been known in Siam long before 1932,² and in the 1920's communist propaganda and activities became a major concern of the government.

Pre-1932 Marxist-communist activity in Siam was limited almost exclusively to non-Thai ethnic groups. The most important of these was the Chinese, followed by the Vietnamese, with a scattering of other nationalities. The few reported cases of ethnic Thai involvement almost all concerned students or exiles living in Europe, and even in these cases the evidence was usually doubtful, while the definition of 'communism' used by the Thai government and its informants was so broad as to cover practically the whole spectrum of leftist politics. There were occasional reports that Thai or Western agents, such as the mysterious Slater, reputedly a British subject, were being sent from Europe to organize communist cells in Siam, but none of these reports

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1. The best known studies in English are Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia* (New York, 1950), pp. 51-75, and David A. Wilson, "Thailand and Marxism," in Frank N. Trager, editor, *Marxism in Southeast Asia* (Stanford, 1959), pp. 58-101.

There is a brief mention of communism in Siam in the 1920's in Thompson and Adloff, p. 53, which mistakenly attributes to Prince Traidos (see VII) the title of 'Phya,d and which refers inaccurately to "the Ang Yee society ('ang yee,d from Chinese, being the generic term in Thai for any Chinese secret society).

Thompson and Adloff mention (p. 52) as factors contributing to the failure of communism to win any significant number of Thai converts, "the widespread peasant proprietorship of the land, the absence of intense economic misery, popular devotion to the Chakri dynasty, the strong hold of Buddhism on the population, and the lack of an independence struggle such as has occurred in the neighboring colonial countries,d' as well as communism's identification with the Chinese minority.

2. There is a mention of 'communism,' perhaps the first in Thai history, in an 1881 letter from Prince Devawongs to the American Consul-General, John A. Halderman, expressing King Chulalongkorn's regret at the shooting of President Garfield, and the king's hope that the "Superagency who ruled this Universe" would help Garfield "escape from this unfortunate jaw he is now under.d' "And His Majesty think that the time would come when Providence will open a measure to secure all rulers in this world from the hands of those based classes Socialist, Nihilist Communists etc." (United States, Department of State, Despatches from Bangkok, July 15, 1881, spelling as in original.)

was ever confirmed.³ Instead, the available evidence indicates that communist activities in Siam were largely confined to non-Thai Asians whose primary political concern was not Siam but their native countries -- China or the various colonial lands of Southeast Asia.

Among the Chinese involved were both adherents of the communist movement in China and various Kuomintang factions, which in the eyes of the Thai government were also 'bolshevik.' Southeast Asian communists in Siam included a number of leaders of anti-colonial nationalist movements -- in the late 1920s Ho Chi Minh spent a year in northeastern Siam, and in 1925 the Indonesian Tan Malaka was reportedly in Chiang-mai⁴ -- for whom Siam provided a base of operations beyond the reach of colonial police.

In 1927 an American diplomat reported a conversation in which the Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs outlined what he believed to be communist objectives in Siam:⁵

Prince Traidos gave it as his opinion that the present situation in so far as Moscow was concerned was about as follows. Siam was an Asiatic country with an Asiatic Government and Asiatic people. There was not the slightest indication that communism could or would make any headway with the Siamese and even if it did, Siam was a small and unimportant country in world affairs so that any real effort on the

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3. For reports on communist activities in Europe and Siam see the National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/61; 66, and 174; Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, nos. 2987, 3881, 4058, 4126, 4926, 4928, 5572, and 5828 in the series F ----/2987/40 (March to May, 1927); and United States, Department of State, Despatches from Siam, 892.00B/1 and 892.4016/6 (May, July 1927). The Thai government had reservations about the authenticity of some of the information received, while the British noted that the Thai government paid its informants so little that it could hardly expect authentic intelligence.

There were occasional cases of alleged communist influence in the Bangkok press. In 1927, for example, the Thai-language *Siam Review* was closed down because of an article on popular government which implied that only violence could bring change, and then cited the fate of Czar Nicholas II of Russia, saying that if he were still alive he would regret having acted too slowly, and warning that other ruling monarchs should take care and heed the voice of the people. (National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 19.2/10; United States, Department of State, Despatches from Siam, 892.00B/1, July 22, 1927, Mackenzie to the Secretary of State.)

There is no immediately apparent explanation for the concentration of Seventh Reign materials on communism in the year 1927, but it may be noted that 1927 was also a year of momentous events for the communist movements in China and in Indonesia.

4. On Ho Chi Minh see Hoai Thanh et al., *Souvenirs sur Ho Chi Minh* (Hanoi, 1962), pp. 102-117 (pp. 119-135 in the English translation *Days with Ho Chi Minh* [2nd edition, Hanoi, 1962]). The reports concerning Tan Malaka are (pp. 11, 28) in a secret report (in English, 83 pp.) on Indonesian Communist Party activities, July 1, 1925 to January 1, 1927, in which the government of the Netherlands Indies sent to the Thai government (National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/61)i
5. United States, Department of State, Despatches from Siam, 892.4016/6 (May 14, 1927), Greene to the Secretary of State.

part of Moscow would scarcely justify itself.⁶ The object and aim of the Communists therefore was to use Siam as a sort of neutral base from which to carry on activities in south eastern Asia. Three Western powers possessed important colonies in the vicinity of Siam, Burma and India to the west, French Indo-China to the east and the Dutch East Indies⁷ to the south, and in his opinion it was at these that the activities of Moscow were really aimed. Prince Traidos said that in the reports received from the Siamese Legation in Paris, it had been clearly indicated that the Soviet had felt it necessary to increase its activities in south eastern Asia, and to have a center from which to base its work. What more logical than that Siam should constitute that center, where the Bolsheviks doubtless hoped to have more freedom of action than could be hoped for in one of the colonies of the great powers whose organization for protecting itself against communist activity must necessarily be greater than that of Siam.

The activities of the various anti-colonial movements posed a serious dilemma for the Thai government. On the one hand, the Thai were proud of being the only people in Southeast Asia to have maintained their national independence, and it followed logically that they understood and sympathized with the desires of other Asian peoples to throw off Western rule. On the other hand, Siam was vitally interested in maintaining good relations with the major Western powers, and particularly France and Great Britain, the two great colonial powers of the region. Furthermore, it appeared that these independence movements were to a considerable extent communist inspired and led (in part because of the effectiveness of colonial police in suppressing moderate nationalists), and the success of such movements would inevitably increase the threat which communism posed to the conservative political and social order of Siam.

The ambivalent attitude of the government of Siam toward Southeast Asian nationalism was clearly shown in a draft letter to French authorities which the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Devawongs, submitted to King Prajadhipok in December of 1930.⁸ The French had requested the extradition of some Vietnamese whom the Thai authorities had arrested at Phichit, charging that they were 'communists.' Such requests were frequent in the period and created awkward situations, for the Thai government had no illusions about the probable fate of persons turned over to the colonial police. In the draft reply, Prince Devawongs wrote that although the French said "that these Annamites are communists it is clear from the evidence that their chief purpose is to establish

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6. However, a report (in English) entitled "Communist Intrigues in Siam" received by the Thai government in 1927 concluded, "The Soviet Government, knowing it is doomed to fail in China, would be pleased if it could achieve the overthrow of an absolute monarchy in the Far East, even as small as Siam.^a" This report also claimed that Vajiravudh had surrounded himself with favorites, and that King Prajadhipok "has made a clean sweep of these favourites, who have now formed an anti-royalist party bitterly opposed to the government" (National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/61)a
 7. The text reads "Dutch West Indies," an apparent error that has been corrected here.
 8. The draft letter, with the king's comments and corrections, is in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1/24.

independence of their country,⁹ and such taint or trace of communism as appears in the documents or their conduct are incidental to their main purpose." He said that Siam was anxious to cooperate with its neighbors in suppressing communism, but that in the case in question there was not enough evidence to justify deporting the suspects to Indochina. He then continued with a paragraph summarizing the Thai attitude toward independence movements:

Obviously, the recent movement in certain Eastern countries to regain their independence presents a difficult problem for His Majesty's Government. It is but natural that such a movement should find a certain amount of sympathy amongst the people of this country. On the other hand it is the sincere desire of His Majesty's Government to preserve its relations of friendship and comity which happily exist between itself and all European Powers. The course which His Majesty's Government should pursue is clearly marked. It cannot be expected that it would give aid and help to the European powers in putting down insurrections¹⁰ or movements aimed at independence. On the other hand it does not intend to give aid or encouragement to such movements.

This was an accurate statement of the Thai position but it would hardly have pleased the French, and King Prajadhipok, a more prudent diplomat than his Foreign Minister, crossed the paragraph out of the draft reply.¹¹

The document translated here gives a standard Marxist analysis of the Thai social, economic, and political system. Although originally written in Chinese, like practically all Marxist writing of the period in Siam,¹² it is atypical in that it deals almost exclusively with the

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9. The king crossed out the phrase "to establish independence of their country" and substituted the more bland "mainly of a political nature."
 10. The text has "resurrections" rather than the obviously intended "insurrections."
 11. There is also a lengthy letter (in Thai, dated December 11, 1930) in the National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/203, in which the king expresses his fear that an independent Vietnam would be dominated by China, posing a Chinese threat to Siam, and that therefore despite Thai sympathy for the Vietnamese people no aid should be extended to help them overthrow French rule.
See also the file of Thai newspaper articles on Vietnamese anticolonialism, and particularly the nationalist leaders Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh, in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of the Interior, 26.5/11e. Like the official view, that of the press was ambivalent: while admiration was expressed for the desire of the Vietnamese to obtain freedom and 'not be slaves' the nationalist leaders were at the same time criticized for having rebelled against legitimate and benevolent authority, as represented by 'our friends' the French.
Phan Boi Chau had visited Siam several times during the period 1908-1911 in connection with anti-French activities.
 12. While the communist literature uncovered by the government was virtually all in Chinese, it was occasionally accompanied by translations into Thai, and sometimes English (presumably for the benefit of the English-language press). It has been noted that so far as is known the classic works of Marxist literature were never translated into Thai (Wilson, in *Marxism in Southeast Asia*, p. 98).
In the months immediately following the 1932 coup, a short-lived period of

internal conditions of the country, rather than the more usual topics of world revolution and events in China, India, or the Soviet Union.³ King Prajadhipok himself considered it an exceptional document, as shown in the comments--themselves rather exceptional--which he made upon it:⁴

This is very well written, and not the work of someone foolish. Also, it was not written in China, but in Siam. The author is a knowledgeable person well worth listening to, and I would like for all the members of the cabinet to read it in order to see what communist propaganda in Siam is like. If the contents of this document were disseminated among the agricultural classes in Siam, many might find it quite convincing. It is very different from all other such documents I have seen.

As might be expected, in the Marxist analysis the Western imperialists figure as the main villains of the piece. This provides an interesting parallel to a case of a very different form of political dissent which occurred in the last days of the Sixth Reign and the first days of the Seventh Reign--a *phu wiset* rebellion. A *phu wiset* is a person claiming to have supernatural powers and for centuries movements led by *phu wiset*, usually with millennial overtones, have been a feature of the rural Southeast Asian scene. The *phu wiset* 'rebellion' near Saraburi, north of Bangkok, late in 1925 was a minor affair, in which the *phu wiset* and his handful of followers were soon killed or dispersed by the Thai authorities.⁵ The leader of the rebellion, known in the

unusual political freedom and activity, there was a rash of appearances of communist leaflets in Bangkok, including some, in the words of the conservative *Bangkok Times*, "in English, of all languages" (October 3, 1932)i

13. There is a document (in Thai, translated from Chinese) between the two extremes, in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1/24, dated May 1, 1930, and addressed to the 'Workers of Siam' by the 'Committee of the Communist Party of Siam.' After complaining of working conditions in Siam and calling on workers to unite to better their lot, the document attacks the monarchy as 'an instrument of the imperialists' and even makes the charge that the king is planning to join with the great powers to overthrow the government of Soviet Russia. It calls for the overthrow of the monarchy and the imperialists and the establishment of a 'democratic' Siam. It concludes with a May Day appeal to carry out a program of 14 diverse points, among them resisting police who arrest peddlers, overthrowing the royal family and the big landowners, opposing a second world war which is expected to break out among the great powers, and aiding the Soviet Union and the revolutionary movements in China and India.
14. The text is taken from a copy of a letter from a royal secretary to the Ministry of the Interior. As was always done in royal correspondence, King Prajadhipok's original comments, characteristically in a simple and lucid Thai, have been rewritten into *ratchasap*, the special dialect used when talking to or of high members of the royal family, and recast in the third person. The present editor has taken the liberty of changing the passage back into the first person and dropping some of the royal embellishments (National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/187)i
15. The documents relating to this episode are in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of the Interior, 14/1.

government accounts as 'Ai Kan,'¹⁶ had a criminal record and a history of strange behavior, was a sometime monk, and also had pretensions to royal blood¹⁷--all recurrent elements in the *phu wiset* tradition. What was new was the aim of the rebellion, which according to Ai Kan was to send a message to the king complaining that the Thai people were being oppressed by foreigners, particularly the British and the French, whom he held responsible for economic hardships, higher taxes, and the alleged abandonment of the Buddhist religion in favor of Christianity. Ai Kan then gave the king seven days in which to throw off foreign domination, failing which he would come deal with the situation himself.

Within a few days Ai Kan was dead and the uprising ended, but it is striking that intellectual traditions as far removed from one another as Marxism and the *phu wiset*; both looking mainly at central Siam, the region in which the nineteenth century treaties with the West had led to the development of a widespread commercial rice agriculture, should come to such similar conclusions about the nature and causes of conditions in the countryside.¹⁸

The document is in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1/24, and the National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/187.

16. 'Ai,' in this context, is a derogatory title used with the names of slaves, criminals, and rebels.

17. According to one account, Ai Kan claimed to be the son of the 'royal personage' drowned in a boating mishap at Ang Thong, which he himself survived. Ai Kan was said to be 43 years old in 1925, and hence presumably was born in the early 1880's. In 1880 a queen of Chulalongkorn, *enceinte* at the time, was drowned along with her small daughter in a boating accident on the river between Bangkok and the palace at Bang Pa-in. Bang Pa-in is some 50 kilometers below Ang Thong on the Chao Phya River.

In another account, Ai Kan styled himself a son of a royal person of the Front Palace, the residence of the 'Second King' in the Bangkok period.

Government records claimed that Ai Kan had been born near Lopburi of commoner parentage.

18e Although written some four years after the *phu wiset* uprising, the Marxist analysis also relates to a period of relative prosperity, before the effects of the depression were strongly felt.

DRAFT STATEMENT ANALYZING THE GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY OF SIAM,
AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ASSOCIATION, APPROVED BY THE
SPECIAL ENLARGED COMMITTEE, MARCH 20
(Translation from Chinese)

Siam is an agricultural country, but since the imperialists came to sell goods the economy, which was formerly self-sufficient, has been upset to the point of long since being ruined. The basic agricultural product is rice, which accounts for 90% of the total annual exports, going mostly to British colonies. The major import is cotton textiles, of which 80% or more come from Great Britain. Cloth used to be woven in Siam, but now there is scarcely any in the market. Thai handicrafts are not exported at all, and raw materials are in short supply, insufficient for the internal needs of the country. Siam is therefore nothing but a great market for the imperialists.

Formerly, since Great Britain and France had equal influence in Siam, Siam was called an independent country. Now it is clear that Siam is really a dependency of Great Britain, as in 1855 the British were the first to force Siam to make a treaty of commerce.¹ The important point of that treaty was that Great Britain got certain special rights, namely the right to trade freely and the stipulation that import duties were not to exceed 3%. When World War I broke out in Europe, the government of Siam had to send a contingent of soldiers to help the British.² The British Consul . . . [note in Thai says that here the Chinese text is too faint to read] . . . changed in many ways, international courts or advisers. . . . Today the administrative power in Siam remains in the hands of the British as before, while in the economy Great Britain overshadows all other countries. Of the annual trade of Siam, 80% and up of the exports are British, while for imports the figure is 97% or more. Of the passenger vessels that enter the Gulf of Siam in one year, one third or more of the tonnage is British, and British shipping is more than twice that of any other country. Siam's mining in the northern Malay peninsula is completely controlled by seven big British companies. The Hongkong and Shanghai Bank has the power to dominate the financial affairs of Siam. The money which the government of Siam has borrowed to construct railways is all British and, moreover, the railway line from Bangkok to British Malaya is clearly wholly the property of the British. Considering all these things, administrative and financial power in Siam is in the hands of the British, and it is clear that Siam is a colony of the British imperialists.

As time went by, differences developed between the British and the French in Siam. In 1887³ France used military force to seize Thai

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1. Commercial treaties had been made with Great Britain in 1826 and the United States in 1833, but the 1855 treaty with Great Britain was the first in which Siam was forced to cede rights impinging on Thai sovereignty.
 2. Siam entered the war on July 22, 1917.
 3. The date intended is probably 1893.

territory in order to make Siam a French Asian colony like Vietnam, but the French were opposed by the British who wanted to control Siam themselves. Great Britain and France therefore agreed to have equal rights in Siam. But that situation has now changed--on the one hand Siam has become a dependency of Great Britain as was shown, and on the other hand the United States and Japan have recently come in and are competing with the British for influence. The Japanese in Siam, in addition to competing to the utmost in commerce, in 1928 set up a special association to concentrate their resources for expanding their influence in Siam, and the Americans, going even further, from the time of the First World War became the first to consider giving up their consular court rights in Siam, in order to remove British influence. In 1925 the American adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁴ wrote openly attacking the British, and recently the Americans have established a special commercial association in order the better to compete with the British commercially and to exploit Siam. Therefore, in the present state of divisions among the imperialists to seize Siam, Great Britain versus the United States must be considered the principal split, followed by Great Britain versus Japan and France, as in the other countries of the 'South Seas.'⁵

At present the government administration in Siam is a system in which the royal family are masters of the land with governing power. At the same time, as a result of the imperialists sending in money there has developed a class of compradores of businesses and banks who curry favor with those holding royal power. Thus at present the royal government and the compradore class, owners of the land, are instruments for delivering Siam to the imperialists. Near the end of the nineteenth century three areas in the region of Cambodia were transferred to France and four areas in the Trengganu region were given to Great Britain.⁶ Supposedly this was in return for the surrender of consular court rights, but in fact it was like giving away something for nothing. The revision of the unequal treaties, as before, actually resulted in treaties which still severely restricted Thai sovereignty; for example, the foreign loans only resulted in the imperialists further seizing control of financial affairs. As for joining the Allied forces in 1917, it only demonstrates subservience to the British imperialists. The spoils seized from the German enemy in Siam, with the exception of the Legation, all went to the British and Siam got nothing. In sum, Siam at present is actually a colony of the British, and therefore the British benefit from helping the government to rule as their agents of oppression.

The imperialists want the absolute monarchy in Siam to be perpetuated in order to preserve their instrument of oppression. They want the royal government to endure. The economic foundation of this government is apparent--the royal family who have the ruling power are large landowners. This is the important economic foundation of the government, and a means by which the imperialists increase their influence and domination in Siam.

4. The adviser was Francis B. Sayre (see I).

5. 'South Seas,' a standard phrase in Chinese, was used to designate (approximately) the maritime Southeast Asian region.

6. The cessions of territory actually took place early in the twentieth century.

The result of this imperialist economic oppression will surely be the speedy ruin of the farmers. The government increasingly extorts high taxes, and the capitalists demand high rates of interest on loans. Oppression is pervasive. The farmers, who are the majority, thus become more impoverished each day, and suffer increasingly. The numbers of thieves and bandits increase in proportion. Yet there are many well-to-do Thai farmers. The ordinary ones have 50 or 100 *rai* each,⁷ and those who rent land pay only about one tenth of their income in rent. Therefore some people think that the land question in Siam is not an important problem, and that as for poor farmers it is a question of capital rather than land. This kind of thinking is the thinking of those who still have an imperfect understanding of the situation. Even though it is not yet possible to describe in detail the basis for the farmers' struggle, nonetheless looking at the characteristics of oppression and the monopolization of land one can at present distinguish the following important points: (1) The royal family, who control the government, have the advantage, and thus use their privileges to expropriate more land each day. (2) High interest rates are demanded and the farmers are oppressed in every way, until the farmers no longer make enough to pay their debts, and have to give up their land. (3) The imperialists want to profit from a rise in land prices, and are going around buying up farmers' land. (4) At present only one third of the land of Siam has been cleared for cultivation. If more is cleared in the future, the farmers will not benefit. The land of the farmers at present remaining will be taken away so that less and less is left, and land rents will become increasingly oppressive. (5) Farmers who are hired laborers are especially oppressed. When the farming season is over their employers take all of their earnings and dismiss them with nothing. This is one common practice. Even worse is to hire them permanently and slowly bind them and get the advantage until they become slaves. Farmers who have no land must suffer oppression like this. It is clear that the struggle to revise the existing system of concentrated land holdings must break out someday, and the land problem will surely be the basis of the change of the system of government of Siam to that of democracy.

A consequence of the imperialists' coming to compete for profits is that for the Thai people money is increasingly tight. Since the end of the First World War, it is apparent that money has become scarce just as in the various colonial lands of the 'South Seas.' Agriculture and manufacturing have to a large extent come to a standstill. Among workers about 2 out of 3 are now unemployed. Many Chinese shops and factories have closed, as for example last year as many as 60% of the rice mills ceased production. Because of this shortage of money, the royal government, in order to preserve its ruling power, has tried to improve the condition of the people, as for instance by lowering export duties, which is actually not of much importance in aiding industrial capital in the country, and by trying to improve the economic situation of the farmers, in hopes of postponing their political awakening. But this alleged improvement in the economic condition of the farmers, other than protecting the interests of the landlords, only amounts to the construction of some irrigation works in areas close to Bangkok. In addition, there are also what are called 'agricultural cooperatives,' but the result of these cooperatives is only to collect high interest rates and oppress the farmers, not to make the farmers prosper. The reason the farmers cannot be helped to escape from poverty is largely

7. An area of one *rai* is equal to about 0.4 acre

because the imperialists maintain their advantage and are not willing to concede anything at all, as clearly shown in the case of giving up the consular courts and revising the treaties. As for raising the duty on imports from 3% to 5%, it applies only to certain imports which are small in quantity and are not necessities--it still cannot be said that Siam can set the duty rates herself. Even though when the United States and Great Britain were at odds over the treaties, the United States declared that it was willing to give up its consular court rights in Siam, this was only American policy, which uses the strategy of withdrawal to attack Siam, which is an even more vicious policy than before. To think that this is a concession by the Americans would be a very serious misunderstanding.

Various Classes in Siam

1) Siam has people of many races mixed together, as in the various colonial lands of the 'South Seas,' and all are similarly oppressed by the imperialists. The people of Siam are of the Thai, Lao, Mon, and Malay races, as well as many still uncivilized groups living in the jungle. Of those who have come from other countries, the Chinese, Indians, and Vietnamese are greater in number than other nationalities. According to the latest figures the total population of Siam is over 11 million. Of these the Thai are the largest group, followed by the Chinese. In terms of occupations, farmers are the largest group.

2) Siam has more than 300,000 monks. This group, dependent upon the rice of others for sustenance, is one instrument for the preservation of the power of royalty. They are land owners and lend money at high rates of interest. Although they are of high standing, for the most part they have studied the principles of capitalism, like the Europeans.

3) The royal family are a special class and few in number. On the one hand they are great landowners, and on the other hand they rule as agents of the imperialists.

4) The landowning class: all who have land, but do not work the land themselves are included in the 'landowning class.'

5) The compradores: agents of the imperialists who import goods and exchange them for agricultural products to export are the trading compradores. In addition, there are banking compradores who lend money to the farmers at high rates of interest. This class works closely with those of rank and authority.

6) Those with capital who sell goods in the villages: this group is closely associated with the landowners. They are clever in selling merchandise and loaning money to the farmers, asking high prices and high rates of interest, then waiting to get the crop or confiscate the land.

7) Thai capitalists: history shows that persons of this class can also join in the struggle to change the system of government. But in Siam this group is very weak, and for the most part they combine with the ruling class to oppress the poor classes. Even worse, some aid the imperialists in vying to seize Siam as a colony of this or that country (this is clearly seen in their showing approval of the Americans--who are disciples of imperialism--believing that they have good inten-

tions toward Siam). Thus we see that this group cannot be with us. Only the masses can be the force to oppose imperialism.

8) The wealthy farmers: this group are in part farmers, in part landowners. In Siam they are not few in number. They farm themselves, and also invest money seeking profit. When they have a lot of money they go into trade and consider themselves superior, hiring either seasonal laborers or permanent laborers who eventually become slaves. These are the wealthy farmers.

9) The farmers: (a) The middle level farmers: whether they farm their own land or farm rented land, they make enough to support their families with perhaps a little left over. Sometimes they might hire some temporary farm labor, but they have no land to rent to others. These are called middle level farmers. (b) The poor farmers: these are divided into two groups. One group farms a little land and can make enough to support themselves, without having to hire themselves out to others. The other group cannot produce enough to live, and have to work as laborers.

10) Rural workers: this group are laborers working in farming or lumbering in the forests. They are the propertyless people of the villages. In Siam this group is large, and in the future it will in the nature of things get even larger.

11) Those in industry: Siam, although a country with a relatively poor economy, nevertheless has some large enterprises (such as railways, sawmills, and cement factories), and these enterprises have more than 3000 workers, all Thai or Chinese. Even though at present the total number of workers is not yet known with certainty, it is apparent that since the end of the war in Europe there has been rapid development.

Siam, in addition to always having had bandits and robbers causing trouble in various provinces, has also had leaders gathering followers to foment rebellions in various places, as for example about the middle of last year there were many reports of opposition to the king. It should be remembered that upon investigation it was found that these doings were not aimed at changing the system, but were caused by government officials who had been dismissed from their positions, who conspired with local authorities to seize power, acting only in their own self-interest. It was also found that there were persons buying large quantities of guns and ammunition from abroad. It is clear that all this was being supported behind the scenes by the imperialists. But it shows that the reason that the government is always divided is because the condition of the farmers is so bad. In yet another case, not too long ago merchants in Bangkok united to oppose the collection of the capitation tax, closing their stores and stopping work for many days.⁸ This shows that the division between the capitalist class and the official class will persist for a long time.

In summary: 1) Siam surely cannot remain outside the historical laws affecting the condition of all countries in this age, and it is possible that the country will be partitioned by the imperialists. The

8. The reference is presumably to the Chinese strike of 1910. See G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1957), pp. 162-164.

people of Siam being in a situation like this, it is natural that they must undergo even greater suffering, and must be oppressed by the royal power, which is protected by the imperialists. The only way to escape this suffering is to destroy the imperialists and those who serve as their instruments, and it is necessary to oppose the establishment of a national assembly and a constitution, which would only be a means of deceiving the people.

2) Those Thai without property will now persuade the farmers to join the struggle. The general slogan should be "Begin by opposing rents and moneylenders, until the owners are overthrown." This slogan means to oppose only the rich farmers, because most of the middle level farmers should rally to our side. As for the poor farmers and rural laborers, they should all be united with us.

3) Up until this time, Siam has never experienced a violent struggle to change the system. But at present it is apparent that the class conflict is becoming increasingly intense, and even members of the official class cannot get along with one another. The propertyless class should point out to the people that this strife is the result of the imperialists scrambling to expand their influence in Siam. If disturbances break out, we will not help either side. Our desire is that both sides be defeated, then immediately to unite the people to struggle against the imperialists, against the power of royalty, and against the landowners. If there develops a split between the wealthy people and the royal class, then the propertyless class should oppose royalty, but at the same time should not become intimate with the wealthy class. The struggle must continue until the propertyless class are the leaders, holding absolute power.

4) The conclusions of this analysis of the government and economy of Siam are in accord with the procedures for parties in the South Seas which the central association sent to the South Seas parties October 23 of last year, and both can be used as a guide to operations.

Until the third meeting of representatives in the South Seas is held, this document should be considered as only a draft.

February 20, 1930
Committee in Siam

[A note in Thai says that there follows more discussion of the communists' methods of operation, but that the text is faded and can be read only in parts and that therefore it has not been translated. Signed by the head Chinese translator of the Bangkok police, dated May 6, 1930.]

VI. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Introduction

The Seventh Reign had begun amid severe economic difficulties, but a vigorous program of economy and 'retrenchment' in 1925-1926 succeeded in turning what had been sizeable deficits in the national budget into substantial surpluses. This satisfactory state of national finances continued for several years, until in 1930-1931 the effects of the world depression began to undermine Siam's financial position. The price of rice, the country's principal export, dropped sharply, and government revenues fell far below expectations. In September of 1931 Great Britain left the gold standard. Siam's currency, the baht, had been linked to sterling and hence to gold, and on the recommendation of the British Financial Adviser, E. L. Hall-Patch, Siam cut the link with sterling and remained on a gold standard. In late 1931 and early 1932 the economic situation steadily worsened, and a major debate developed within the government over the proper policies to be followed.

The issues involved were many and complex, but the main questions were whether Siam should abandon gold and return to a link with sterling, in effect devaluing the baht; how the large expected deficit for 1931/32 was to be budgeted for; how great the cuts necessary in government expenditure were and where they should be made; and what realistic estimates were for government revenue and expenditure for 1932/33.¹

The two major protagonists were the Minister of Commerce and Communications, Prince Purachatra,² and the Minister of Finance, Phya Komarakul Montri, both backed by the foreign advisers of their respective ministries. The Minister of Finance and Hall-Patch stood firm for the classical policies of conservative finance, including maintenance of the gold link, at least until the budget was safely balanced, drastic cuts to bring the budget into balance, and the use of conservative estimates of expected revenue in preparing the budget for the coming year. The Minister of Commerce and Communications and his advisers were less concerned with the technical aspects of finance--questions such as reserves, currency cover, and debt funding--than with the effects of the economic crisis on trade. Maintaining the high value of the baht, they argued, was making Thai rice uncompetitive in sterling bloc markets, which made up a major portion of Siam's traditional export trade. They pointed to widespread economic distress in the

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1. There is extensive documentation on the economic crisis of 1931-1932 in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Finance files.
 2. Prince Purachatra was a son of King Chulalongkorn and the leading figure in technological modernization in the last years of the absolute monarchy. While best known for his work as head of the state railway system, he also made important contributions to the development of aviation, telecommunications, and highways in Siam. He became Minister of Commerce and Communications early in the Seventh Reign and in 1931 was made a member of the Supreme Council of State.

countryside,³ and expressed the fear that further cuts in the government's administrative expenses might have not only economic but political repercussions. Thus they favored relinking the baht to sterling, limiting further cuts in government expenditure even if this meant larger deficits (they were willing to raid various reserve funds set aside for specified purposes if necessary to cover temporary shortages), and they took a more optimistic view of projected government revenue for 1932/33. Other ministers and advisers offered yet other opinions, differing in greater or lesser degree from these two basic positions. Even Sir Edward Cook, the former Financial Adviser credited with successfully salvaging Siam's financial position in 1925-1926, was sending advice from his new post in Egypt. Cook had chosen Hall-Patch as his successor, but he now became increasingly critical of the Hall-Patch policy, especially on the question of maintaining the link with gold.⁴

In the middle of these conflicting opinions stood the king, who had repeatedly made the point that he had little understanding of economic matters (see I), but who nevertheless had to make all the final decisions.⁵ In February of 1932, when the divisions in the government over economic policy were most acute, Prajadhipok gave the speech reprinted here to an assembly of military officers. The king began by saying that he felt that he "was born to cut things down," a reference to the retrenchment program at the beginning of the reign, to the recent cutbacks, and to the further cuts anticipated, and then discussed the economic situation and possible remedies. He argued that if the government had made mistakes the mistakes were in not having taken certain steps rather than in any of the steps which had been taken. Finally, referring candidly to the split among his advisers and to his own difficult position, the king concluded:⁶

The financial war is a very hard one indeed. Even experts contradict one another until they become hoarse. Each offers a different suggestion. I myself do not profess to know much about the matter and

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3. The Ministry of Commerce and Communications' reports on rural economic conditions in the spring of 1932 are summarized briefly by the present editor in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, 61:2 (July 1973), 192-193.
 4. In a letter to Raymond B. Stevens dated March 5, 1932, Cook described Hall-Patch as "the best man I could find--on the salary which the Siamese were prepared to give" (National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Finance, 15.1/4)i
 5. The king's difficulties were not helped by the fact that in the early months of the crisis he was being told by his advisers that the world economy had been in an abnormal state since World War I, and that the world depression was only "a sudden return to normal conditions" (National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Commerce and Communications, 8.1/1)i
 6. The English translation of the speech is taken from the *Bangkok Times*, February 13, 1932i. It should be noted that while the English version is probably not deliberately misleading, in places it softens the wording. In the passage quoted, the phrase "I myself do not profess to know much about the matter . . ." is in Thai ข้าพเจ้าเองไม่รู้เรื่องการเงินเลย or 'I myself know nothing at all about financial matters. . . .' (The original Thai text is in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 21/5.)

all I can do is to listen to the opinions of others and choose the best. I have never experienced such a hardship; therefore if I have made a mistake I really deserve to be excused by the officials and people of Siam.

The king had made two shorter but similar speeches, also to military groups, in the fall of 1931, but they had received little notice.⁷ However, the government decided to give the February speech maximum publicity, and in this it was successful. The full text was published in both the Thai and English language press in Bangkok and the complete English text was reprinted in *Samaggi Sara* (see IV) in London, and the speech rapidly became one of the best known documents of the reign. The government-supported *Bangkok Times* praised the king's forthrightness,⁸ but others wondered if it were wise for an absolute ruler to make such a frank statement of the country's problems and the government's inability to deal with them. The American Minister described the speech as "almost an apology and a confession of lack of confidence in the Government's policy,"⁹ while the British Chargé reported to London that the speech "was, of course, intended to enlist the sympathy of the officers of the army and navy. It seems to me, however, to be a somewhat risky experiment for an absolute monarch, ruling over a people of whom the great majority are still uneducated, to confess to mistakes and doubts. Also, I cannot help thinking that it would have been better not to have given it so much publicity."⁹

The frequent references to the speech made by governments in the constitutional period would seem to confirm that such doubts were justified. In 1936, for example, a government-approved school history text quoted from the speech as an illustration of the economic failure of the old regime,¹⁰ while in a 1939 broadcast Prime Minister Phibun cited the speech as justification for the People's Party seizure of power in 1932.¹¹

As to the then sorry plight of the country even King Prajadhipok in his address delivered to the officials at the Minister of Defence in B.E. 2474 alluded to the fact that he was at a complete loss himself.

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7. The Thai texts are in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of War, 1/37, the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 21/4, and the National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/233. See also Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand* (2nd edition, London, 1967), p. 308, and Prince Dhani, *Chumnum Nippon*, pp. 15-18.
 8. *Bangkok Times*, February 16, 1932.
 9. United States, Department of State, Despatches from Siam, 892.00 P.R./35 (March 9, 1932), Kaufman to the Secretary of State; Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 2881/200/40 (February 15, 1932), Johns to Sir John Simon. A hand in the Foreign Office in London added the notation, "The King's speech is a very clear exposition of the state of affairs, but such an apologetic tone from an Eastern autocrat is certainly, as Mr. Johns points out, a departure from tradition which cannot be devoid of risk."
 10. *Prawatsat Sayam* (ประวัติศาสตร์สยาม; History of Siam), Bangkok, 1936, p. 356.
 11. *Bangkok Times*, November 29, 1939. Phibun continued with a paraphrase of part of the speech.

In addition to questioning the political wisdom of the speech, others noted that the king had violated one of the cardinal tenets of financial policy by raising the possibility of a devaluation before it had actually been decided upon and announced. Everything the king said was in fact true, but the government immediately took steps to create a different impression.¹²

The debate within the government over financial policy continued through the early months of 1932, with almost daily meetings, increasingly acrimonious debates, and an exchange of bitter letters and memoranda between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Commerce and Communications. The controversy was finally resolved with the adoption of the Ministry of Commerce and Communications' point of view. Hall-Patch, finding his advice ignored, submitted his resignation in March and shortly thereafter the Minister of Finance was removed, in part because it was discovered that he had failed to inform the king of a letter from Sir Edward Cook critical of Ministry of Finance policy. The new budget was based upon Ministry of Commerce and Communications figures, and a committee, headed by Prince Purachatra, was set up to study the question of going off the gold standard. As expected, the committee's report endorsed such a move, and in May the baht was once again linked to sterling.¹³ A number of new taxes were also introduced, including a controversial and politically unwise salary tax that affected mainly clerks and middle grade officials.¹⁴ Whether these new

12. National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Finance, 14/4.

13. Prince Sithiporn (see III), who had just become Director-General of the Department of Agricultural Research, was a member of the committee. He argued in favor of devaluing the baht as a means of stimulating agricultural exports, and proposed a new value even lower than that finally adopted.

14. The salary tax, which set off a storm of protest in the press, has been described elsewhere by the present editor (*Journal of the Siam Society*, 61:2, July 1973, p. 193) as follows:

The tax affected mainly middleclass government officials and employees of Western-style firms; in particular it left practically untouched royalty and the higher nobility, a major part of whose income was derived from sources other than salaries, and the Chinese merchant class, who generally received no salaries as such at all. The government itself conceded that the tax was unfair, but defended it on the pragmatic grounds that the government lacked the bureaucratic capacity to administer a more equitable but more complex general income tax.

One consequence of the new taxes was a prophetic article by a French writer, published in Saigon in May and discussed in the Bangkok press before the *coup*, which said in part:

Budget difficulties have always led to political changes, and Siam will not escape from the rule. An absolute monarchy which has been forced by events seriously to increase taxation could not long continue in the patriarchal form; it has itself signed a decree for its modernisation. Such is the inevitable, if not imminent, consequence of the economic and financial crisis.

(Translation from the *Bangkok Times*, June 4, 1932; on June 7 the *Bangkok Times* published a translation of comments on the article which had appeared in a Thai-language paper.)

policies would have succeeded is impossible to say--before they had had time to show measurable results the absolute monarchy was overthrown on June 24.¹⁵

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15. There were some indications of improvement in the economic situation in May and early June of 1932, especially in the rice trade (see the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Commerce and Communications, 8.1/4), while the speed with which the economic crisis was overcome by the constitutional government also suggests that the policies of the former government may have had beneficial effects.

ROYAL ADDRESS TO THE MILITARY, FEBRUARY 5, 1932

To-day I heard that the Minister had collected the officers together in order to explain to them the financial position resulting from the depressed condition of the country. I have therefore taken the opportunity to attend, and am also taking this opportunity to make some explanations myself to my officer friends. Almost always whenever I met officers I used to express my desire to support the nation's armed forces and to effect progress in both the army and navy. But whenever I did so, I had afterwards to cut one expenditure and then another, which should naturally indicate the futility of my intentions. As a matter of fact I had no intention to deceive, but circumstances presented themselves to force my action so that the resolutions turned into untruths. It is the same thing on this occasion, to my real regret, and I do not know how to effect further reductions. I personally feel that I was born to cut things down. From the beginning I have been cutting and now I am forced to cut the more and I do not know what the future still holds. I take it that it is my bad luck always to do so; even now I have tried all I can to refrain from cutting, but it is beyond me. Truly speaking the retrenchment at present in view makes me feel more heavy at heart than on previous occasions. Formerly I felt that we had more men than work, and hence I did not feel that my action was a matter of very serious moment. Also, then there were openings outside which did not make the finding of the means of livelihood so hard a matter. Now, it is different, and I feel heavy at heart because I realise that the present cuts necessitate the abolishing of positions. The fighting forces are already small in number, and still more cuts have to be made in their ranks. The same thing applies in other Ministries. I realize that the retrenched men will find more difficulties than formerly. It is at the thought of their inability to find something to do that I feel anxiety and sadness, and deeply pity all those who will have to leave. If there is any means whereby I can be of aid to lessen their burden I am only too willing to do so; but the present situation is beyond me and I am forced to order the cut. There are many ways whereby I can avoid cutting, but these are worse than the cutting, as I shall proceed to explain.

Method I: We need not cut anything, either in regard to money or the suspension of officials; and this is an easy matter. We can increase our currency issue and as the notes are only paper, we can also order an increment in the salaries of officials. Just because the notes are only paper, when these are not supported by capital, they are only worth what they really are, i.e. paper. When this is so there is no value attached to them and they will be refused by traders. Such a method would only mean an indirect way of cutting salaries. It forms a deceit pure and simple. For instance, an official receives a salary of Tcso 100. He is actually paid a hundred pieces of useless paper. This being so a direct cut is more preferable. An indirect cut does not only affect officials, but the whole country because it will bring down the value of money. Such a thing happened before in Germany when currency notes issued were not backed by securities. A thing might be worth a thousand in the morning, while the same thing was declared to be worth three thousand in the evening. Those who have had prior ex-

perience of this method do not wish to experience it again. Other countries therefore refrain from taking that as an example. This being so we should not try to issue such currency notes because if we do so, it will not answer the purposes of the Services, but would only serve to show that the Government is cheating.

Method II: We may try to increase revenue by increasing taxes. To collect such taxes from the poor is at present impossible. Hence we can only think of taxing the wealthy. At present taxes on the rich by increased tariffs have already been imposed and further increase is still being contemplated. Even so, after due calculations we find that with such increases our revenue is still insufficient. This is because the wealthy among us are still few in number when compared with other countries. Even take my own case, there are many who think I am the richest man. But when compared with a rich Englishman or an American or an Indian Raja, you will find that I am on the lowest grade in their midst. Although I am not so well off, I still submit to being taxed to the utmost without a grumble. As to levying taxes on the rich people there is still a limit which means that the amount to be collected is still below our expectations. Even should we collect all the monies of the rich people in Siam and essay to divide these out, still not many would be enriched thereby. The *Ratsadorn*¹ would not get many Baht each, and such amassed money would only be wasted. Therefore the excess taxing of the rich may possibly bring bad results in its train. It may affect trade and bring it down because when the rich have no money to buy goods, trade will slacken. The maintenance of trade depends also on the assistance given it by the rich. In any case we still have in mind to "fleece" the rich as much as possible as we can not "fleece" the poor.

Method III: We may obtain loans from foreign countries. This can be done, but if we cannot obtain revenue to cope with our expenditure, i.e. if expenditure is still in excess of revenue, the position is bad in respect of such loans. In the case of an individual, law suits would occur, properties would be seized and bankruptcy would follow. It is the same with a country. If there is insufficient revenue and loans are obtained, its properties, such as railways, etc., would be seized. Ultimately the country goes bankrupt and our freedom would gradually come to an end. Certain precedent cases have already taken place. I do not wish to see such happenings in Siam, and hence I do not wish to obtain loans. This being so, the only advisable thing to do is to cut down expenses. Therefore it is highly incumbent on us to do away with certain positions to lessen work and just maintain enough to carry on.

If we should speak of hardships, I wish to say that the *Ratsadorn* and the merchants have experienced these more than the *Kha Rajakarn*.² In the case of the former, the *ratsadorn* and the mercantile class, there has already been heavy retrenchment. Both the merchants and the peasants have had their incomes reduced more than the *Kha Rajakarn*. Even the rich people have experienced cuts in their way; for example, paddy land owners have had to pay paddy land taxes, while the rents they obtain have been reduced. It is thus that you cannot say that they are quite happy. But still when compared with the poor peasants

1. *Ratsadorn*: people or subjects, especially as contrasted with officialdom.

2. *Kha Rajakarn*: government officials.

they are better off, because they have enough to live upon. As a matter of fact the wealthy have already had their incomes cut; but of those in the Government service only the ones enjoying high positions have had their salaries cut, not those in low positions. Further I would say that the *Kha Rajakarn* have received increments because of the low prices ruling in the market. Food is lower by a hundred per cent, equivalent to an increment of a hundred per cent in pay. The value of money rests on its purchasing power. If a tical will buy a hundred ticals worth, then an earning of one tical is equivalent to a hundred ticals. It is vice versa if a hundred ticals is only worth a tical in value. Ordinarily we do not stop to think of the purchasing power of our money; we only wait to count its amount. When we experience a cut we realise the lightness of our pockets. But if we pause to think that the purchasing power of our money is more we shall consider that we have had no cut at all. Based on the past those in Government service should consider themselves fortunate in only experiencing the cut after the others. But the time has now arrived for such cuts and it is to be hoped that they will face the situation bravely. All throughout the country are requested to assist in bearing the load at this present juncture.

Now, if we should think of what we should do to remedy the position to increase our revenue, there seems to be only one way and that is we should try to have more produce for sale, most of which may be derived from agriculture. Therefore, firstly, we have to promote agriculture. Secondly, to reduce the expenses of production with a view to easy sale. Thirdly, the haulage freight by train or boat should be reduced. Merchants complain of the dearness of the tical and wish to have it lowered in value. But in all three methods pointed out as being possible means of remedy we still require money, and before all else we have to adjust the receipts and expenditure of the Government to balance, in order not to be indebted before taking any step. We may obtain loans from foreign countries if we consider the same to be beneficial to us. It is the same with the idea of lowering the value of the tical. If we consider doing so when we are indebted to many in big amounts coupled with the fact of our expenditure being in excess of revenue, that will spell disaster and eventually the tical will be low in value, and may become mere scraps of paper. We have, therefore, to be cautious. When the position is properly adjusted and balanced we may aid trade; but the lowering of the tical may only benefit those having goods to sell and will in no way benefit the *Kha Rajakarn* who have to pay more for their purchases. Indirectly this may benefit everybody in general, but this is a dangerous matter when chances of loss and gain have to be taken into consideration. We have to exercise care and caution and when we have supported trade we may be considered to have supported other aspects of the country as well. This is the step under consideration, but before we may do anything it is necessary for us first to adjust the Government balance.

The majority of the Government officials may want to know what is going to be done about the various suggestions proffered by the Press that they have read. As a matter of fact I cannot tell you in detail just yet in regard to whether there is to be a salary cut or abolishment of positions. In time the plans now under discussion will be made known, but we are trying our best to make the same as little painful as possible.

Another thing, there may be some who think that the present financial difficulty experienced by the Government is brought about by cer-

tain fatal steps taken by it. I agree that some mistakes have been made, but not by any steps that have been taken but rather by not having taken such steps. We might have thought of cutting expenses earlier. If more officials had been dismissed and more expenses cut we would not have to do so much cutting now. We did not do this in time because we did not wish to place anyone in hardship. Dared not do it, in fact, and attempted to find ways and means that would enable us to refrain from suspending men. I have resolved all along to refrain from suspending anybody whatsoever. You may call it a soft heart on my part if you like. Ultimately the situation became worse, and hence the present difficulty. I confess that it was a wrong step. Furthermore, we placed too much faith on the duties on imports and exports to save us taking a drastic step. But all such hopes are devoid of results for the good. The hope that business would improve latterly cannot also be entertained because we cannot say when it will improve. Our mistake was based on the fact of too much soft-heartedness and too much reliance on hopes. In no way must the trouble be assumed to be due to a wrong measure taken, but to such measures not being taken at all; that is how we are placed in such bad financial straits. It is hard to determine what the future holds for us. On a previous occasion I have told you officers that we were already engaged in warfare, a warfare that was hardest to fight because the enemies were invisible. If we could see them we could send spies to discover their intention. But at present we cannot send our spies and hence cannot form a conjecture as to their movements. To guess wrongly would only be worse for us. Take the sale of our silver, for which we have been termed very silly.³ This also may be classed in the fact of our not knowing the intention of our enemies. Who was to know that silver would go up in value? Also, no one knew that England was to give up the gold standard for the pound sterling. Apart from the Cabinet Ministers no other person in England knew anything of such a step being contemplated. Therefore, in this case it is beyond us to frame a correct guess because we are not *Devada*⁴ or fortune tellers. The financial war is a very hard one indeed. Even experts contradict one another until they become hoarse. Each offers a different suggestion. I myself do not profess to know much about the matter⁵ and all I can do is to listen to the opinions of others and choose the best. I have never experienced such a hardship; therefore if I have made a mistake I really deserve to be excused by the officials and people of Siam. I hope you will realize my real position in the matter and I trust that everyone will try to be brave to carry us through the crisis till the last obstacle is safely surmounted. I still have more faith in my officers than in others to show their confidence in me and if they wish to spread a rumour let it be one of benefit such as that everyone is prepared to support the Government to their fullest capacity to brave the tide. I have already said before that if an officer felt ill at heart in warfare all of the population would lose or die or become slaves of others. If our fighting forces always have strong hearts and are prepared to fight every time, we would ultimately win our battle. When such victory is secured it will encourage the rest of the people and we shall then succeed in surmounting all obstacles as we have done in the past.

3. In the summer of 1931 the government had sold a part of its silver holdings.

4. *Devada*: supernatural beings, hence endowed with powers of prophecy.

5. See footnote 6 of the introduction to this section.

Therefore I ask you officers to assist by putting up a good heart in support of the resolution of the rest of the Thai race to face the present crisis.

VII. THE LAST CHANCE FOR POLITICAL REFORM

Introduction

In 1931, King Prajadhipok made a long trip to the United States and Canada, the main purpose of which was to seek medical attention for his deteriorating eyesight. During the course of his stay in the United States the king made several statements to journalists about the possibility of introducing a measure of representative government in Siam, and following his return to Bangkok in October the king took steps which indicate that he had modified somewhat his earlier views (see I, II) on the inadvisability of any major changes in the system of government of Siam.

Early in 1932, the king ordered his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Devawongs Varodaya,¹ to submit a plan for a constitution allowing a degree of representative government, which the king hoped to present to the nation on April 6, 1932, the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Chakri Dynasty.² The actual drafting of the plan was turned over by the Minister to Raymond B. Stevens and Phya Sri Wisarn Waja, two high officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Raymond B. Stevens had been since 1926 the Adviser in Foreign Affairs to the government of Siam. He was, like Sayre (see I), an American and a Democrat, and had been active in New Hampshire politics, though not altogether successfully because, he claimed, of his high ideals.³ He had consistently maintained that Siam was not yet ready for major political changes; as he wrote in 1930, "I am of the opinion after four years' service here in Siam that an unlimited monarchy is certainly for a considerable period of time the best government for the country."⁴

1. Prince Devawongs Varodaya was a son of Prince Devawongs Varopakarn, half-brother of Chulalongkorn and Minister of Foreign Affairs for nearly forty years. On the death of the elder Prince Devawongs in 1923 his son succeeded to his office, which he held until the 1932 *coup*. In 1931 he was made a member of the Supreme Council of State. Prince Devawongs Varodaya was awarded his name by the king in 1929, prior to which he had been known as Prince Traidos.

In 1929 Prince Devawongs Varodaya had accompanied the king on a visit to Java, and on the orders of the king had made a study of representative institutions set up by the Dutch colonial administration.

2. According to his own accounts, it was Prince Chula Chakrabongse who first suggested to the king, during a visit to Bangkok late in 1931, the appropriateness of the April 6 date. Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Brought Up in England* (London, 1943), p. 164; *The Twain Have Met* (London, 1956), p. 156.

3. Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 1903/1903/40 (January 28, 1927), Waterlow to Chamberlain.

4. The quotation is from a March 10, 1930, memorandum from Stevens to Prince Bowaradej, in which Stevens argues against Prince Bowaradej's proposal for a stronger press law. (National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 19.2/7.)

Phya Sri Wisarn Waja had been educated in England and was the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following the 1932 *coup* he became the first Foreign Minister of the new regime. He had not been one of the 'promoters' of the *coup*, and his selection was undoubtedly due in part to the desire of the *coup* group to reassure the Western powers and thus reduce the chances of foreign intervention; Phya Sri Wisarn Waja himself told the British Minister in July of 1932 that he had been invited to become Minister of Foreign Affairs "at the point of a bayonet."⁵

In early March of 1932, Stevens and Phya Sri Wisarn Waja submitted a draft "Outline of Changes in the Form of Government" together with comments upon it.⁶ The contents of these documents have been summarized elsewhere by the present editor as follows:⁷

. . . In fact Stevens and Phya Sri Wisarn Waja did draw up an outline plan for change in the political system which was submitted to the Supreme Council of State in great secrecy in March 1932.ⁱ The plan was strikingly similar to that actually implemented by the constitutional regime. It called for the appointment of a prime minister and the removal of the King from the everyday affairs of state (since Chulalongkorn's days the absolute monarchs had in effect served as their own prime ministers).ⁱ The prime minister was to preside over a cabinet responsible to a legislative assembly, and it was recommended that the assembly be composed of equal numbers of appointed and elected members, the elected members to be chosen by an indirect process. The main differences between the proposal and the system actually put into practice after June 1932 were that the Supreme Council of State would be retained, although with a modified membership and functions, and that extensive powers, at least of a 'veto' nature, would be reserved for the monarchy. In separate comments on the proposal, both Stevens and Phya Sri Wisarn Waja maintained that the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Siam was both inevitable and desirable; both however expressed doubts that the proper time had come, pointing to the level of education among the general public as well as the danger of major changes which might disrupt a government already beset by economic crisis. The long, slow process by which a degree of constitutional government had been achieved in Burma and other countries was cited. Both therefore opted for a policy of gradualism, and suggested that local municipal governing assemblies be introduced at once, but that the question of a national assembly be deferred. Stevens went further and also recommended the immediate appointment of a prime minister, a change which he deemed important but not fundamental.ⁱ

However, April 6 came and went without any significant political changes, and less than three months later the absolute monarchy was overthrown. One would like to know how the decision not to implement any of the proposals of Stevens and Phya Sri Wisarn Waja was reached, but thus far little evidence has come to light. The proposals and

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5. Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 6563/4260/40 (July 28, 1932); Dormer to Sir John Simon.
 6. Stevens was probably the actual author of the "Outline," as evidenced by the style, the content, and the secretarial notation "RBSiSP" at the end.
 7. *Journal of the Siam Society*, 61:2 (July 1973), 191.

comments were dated March 8 and 9, and on March 12 copies were sent to Prince Damrong with a covering letter from Chao Phya Mahithon, the head of the Royal Secretariat, saying that the king had ordered the documents sent in order that they be considered and discussed in the Supreme Council of State⁸. As the king hoped to announce the changes by April 6, the meeting of the Supreme Council presumably took place in the latter part of March. Unfortunately the minutes of such a meeting are not known to exist, and it is possible that the king solicited the opinions of the members of the Supreme Council individually rather than in a formal meeting.

However, there is an important piece of later evidence bearing on the decision not to implement any political changes in the spring of 1932. Four days after the June 24 *coup* which overthrew the absolute monarchy the British Chargé went to see Prince Devawongs Varodayao. The prince said that even if asked he would not remain as Minister of Foreign Affairs as "he could not work with those now in power,"⁹ and⁹

He then referred to the constitution and told me that some six months ago the King had instructed him to draw up a constitution to be presented to the people on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Chakri dynasty, that is to say, on the 6th April last. However, the Princes had opposed this project and the King had to give way, although His Majesty had warned them at the time that the inevitable result would be a coup d'état and a military dictatorship. This had now happened and the Princes were reaping the results of their own actions. Prince Devawongs mentioned no names, but he was obviously referring to the members of the Supreme Council, as these would have been the only Princes whom His Majesty would have consulted in such a matter.

In March of 1932 the Supreme Council of State had six members: Prince Boriphat, Prince Damrong, and Prince Naris, the three surviving members of the original five (see I), and the Prince of Lopburi, Prince Purachatra, and Prince Devawongs Varodaya, who had been appointed following the deaths of Prince Bhanurangsi and the Prince of Chantaburi. As noted above, it is uncertain whether a formal meeting took place to discuss the proposed political changes, and if such a meeting did occur it is possible that Prince Damrong and the Prince of Lopburi, who were unwell,¹⁰ and Prince Naris, who often missed meetings, did not attend. But regardless of whether the decision was reached at a meeting, or through the soliciting of opinions individually, or a combination of the two, the statement of Prince Devawongs Varodaya indicates that a majority opposed the king's plan. On the basis of their positions

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8. The covering letter (in Thai) and copies of the outline proposal and the comments of Stevens and Phya Sri Wisarn Waja (all in English) are in the National Archives, Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/242.
 9. Great Britain, Foreign Office Records, F 5918/4260/40 (June 29, 1932), Johns to Sir John Simon.
 10. In March of 1932 Prince Damrong was recovering from a serious illness, and he is known not to have attended meetings of the Supreme Council on March 16 and 18, and the Prince of Lopburi also missed the latter meeting (National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Finance, 14/5). The Prince of Lopburi had been in poor health for years, and following a boating accident and the strenuous ceremonies in connection with the April 6 anniversary he died on April 8.

taken on earlier issues, it seems likely that Prince Damrong and Prince Naris would have been part of the opposition majority, while the evidence of Prince Devawongs Varodaya implies that he and the king favored political changes. The positions of the three remaining members of the Supreme Council, Prince Boriphat, Prince Purachatra, and the Prince of Lopburi, are problematical.¹ In any case, it is unlikely that major changes in the system of government would have been undertaken without virtually unanimous agreement among the high princes of the royal family, and it should also be recalled that both Stevens and Phya Sri Wisarn Waja, the authors of the proposed plan, had been opposed to implementing its more revolutionary provisions.²

In his comments on the proposed plan, Phya Sri Wisarn Waja notes that "there are rumours current that there will be an attempt to overthrow the government at some future occasion." Such rumors were widespread in Bangkok in the weeks before the ceremonies in early April marking the 150th anniversary of the dynasty, not only because of the economic and, to a lesser degree, political discontent, but specifically because of a prophecy, said to have been made by the founder of the Chakri dynasty, that the dynasty would last only 150 years--a prophecy which proved to be remarkably accurate insofar as the absolute power of the dynasty was concerned.

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11. Post-coup rumors held that both Prince Damrong and Prince Boriphat had opposed the king's plans for political reform. Concerning Prince Damrong, who often described himself as a conservative, it is likely that the rumors were correct, but in the case of Prince Boriphat the evidence is more ambiguous (see I). Prince Boriphat's alleged opposition was attributed in part to the fact that the king had no children and Boriphat was regarded as a likely successor to the throne. 'Nai Honhuai,' *Chaofa Prachathipok* (เจ้าฟ้าประจักษ์ศิลปาคม; Prince Prajadhipok), Bangkok, 1948, p. 97.
 12. Several of the published accounts mention that the king was considering granting a constitution on the April 6 anniversary, but the details given are frequently inconsistent with the documents and evidence presented here, especially as regards chronology. See for example Wichai Prasangsit, *Phaendin Somdet Phra Pokklao*, pp. 173-185, and Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Brought Up in England*, p. 164.

A. AN OUTLINE OF CHANGES IN THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

There is submitted herewith, in accordance with the wish of His Majesty, an outline of a new constitution, together with a brief explanation.

In general the plan involves the beginning of a parliamentary form of government. In theory His Majesty still remains the Chief Executive and Law-giver. As Chief Executive, however, He acts through a Prime Minister who is responsible to His Majesty for the administration of the Government. The Prime Minister and Cabinet is [are] under the plan also subject to certain supervisory powers of the Legislative Council.

His Majesty as Law-giver will act with the aid of the Legislative Council composed in a substantial part of elected representatives.

It is not assumed that the plan presented herewith is either complete or perfect. It is put forth as a basis for consideration and is limited to certain main principles. Obviously many details would have to be worked out later.

The Government under this proposal would be as follows:--

- (a) The Monarch
- (b) Supreme Council
- (c) Prime Minister and Cabinet
- (d) Legislative Council

Supreme Council

The Supreme Council will be retained with certain modifications. It should be a small body of not more than 6, and shall be appointed by His Majesty. The term of office shall be as at present--during His Majesty's pleasure--and not for a fixed period.

The Supreme Council should act purely as an advisory body to His Majesty on matters of general policy.

No member of the Supreme Council shall at the same time serve as Prime Minister or member of the Cabinet. Furthermore the Council shall not sit with the Cabinet.

If members of the Cabinet may also serve as members of the Supreme Council the influence and position of the Prime Minister might be seriously weakened.

Prime Minister and Cabinet

Appointment

The Prime Minister shall be selected by His Majesty and shall be responsible to His Majesty for the administration of the Government.

There should be no limitation upon the King's power of selection. He should be free to select the most capable man for the position without regard to any factors except his qualifications for the Office.

If the Prime Minister is to be responsible for the administration of the Government he should have the right to choose his Cabinet Ministers. A complete delegation to the Prime Minister of the power of appointment would be however too drastic a change. It is therefore suggested that the choice of the Prime Minister should be subject to confirmation by His Majesty.

Term of Office

The Prime Minister and Cabinet members shall be appointed for a fixed period and at the expiration thereof their resignations must be offered to His Majesty. They should however be eligible to re-appointment. The term of office should be the same as that for the Legislative Council, so that a new Council and a new Prime Minister and Cabinet should come into office at the same time. This plan would permit changes to be made as a matter of course and without compelling His Majesty to exercise his sovereign power of removal. His Majesty would also have the right at any time to request the resignation of the Prime Minister. Whenever the Prime Minister resigns, either voluntarily or on request, the members of his Cabinet shall also tender their resignations.

The Prime Minister shall preside over Cabinet meetings and will ordinarily be the sole means of communication between His Majesty and the Cabinet.

Legislative Council

Composition

The Legislative Council should be large enough to be representative of the public. On the other hand it should not, at the beginning, be too large, since a numerous body is unwieldy and slow to act.

It is suggested that the Council should be not more than 75 or less than 50.

The Legislative Council may be composed entirely of appointed members or solely of elected members or of a combination of the two. A purely appointed Council would not have sufficient independence and would not be considered by the public as representative. On the other hand a Council composed entirely of elected members might not have sufficient number of persons of experience and judgment in public affairs. It is therefore suggested that at the start the Legislative Council should be equally divided between appointed members and elected members.

Of the members appointed by His Majesty not more than half should be at the same time Government officials. With this limitation His Majesty should be free to select such members as he deems fit.

The Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet shall be members of the Legislative Council ex-officio.

If the Legislative Council is to exercise some power of supervision over the administration, together with the right to pass a vote of lack of confidence, it is essential that the Prime Minister and the members of the Cabinet should have at least the right to sit and speak in the Council. Whether they should also have the right to vote is a debatable question. If the underlying purpose is eventually to establish a Parliamentary Government, then these executives should be full-fledged members of the Council.

Election and Qualifications of Voters

The method of election shall be indirect, that is, the voters of each Amphur shall choose electors who will meet together and elect by ballot the representatives for the Monthon. Since the Amphur districts vary in population from 70 thousand to as low as 3, 4 and 5 thousand the number of electors must be based on population.

Voters must be nationals and reside in the Amphur or Amphurs where the voting takes place. They must also pay a certain amount of tax.

The Monthons, of which there are ten, also vary in population from Nakorn Rajasima with 2,800,000 to Phuket with only 24,000. The number of representatives from the Monthons should also vary according to the population in order that the Legislative Council may approximate a truly representative body.

The election of the members of the Council shall be by majority vote. In case any Monthon fails to elect its representative or representatives His Majesty shall fill the vacancy by appointment.

Qualifications of Members of the Council

They must be Siamese nationals and at least 30 years of age, able to read and write and must pay a certain amount of tax. No elected member shall at the same time hold any other Government position.

Term of Office and Meetings

Members of the Legislative Council should be elected for a fixed period of either 4 or 5 years. This term should be the same as fixed for the period of office for the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Legislative Council should meet at least once each year. It may be called in a special session at any time by His Majesty and may also be dissolved by His Majesty.

Functions of the Legislative Council

1. Legislative

All laws proposed by the Prime Minister must be submitted to the Council for its approval. The Council may adopt amendments or alterations. Furthermore the Council may initiate legislation.

The Budget shall be submitted to the Council by the Prime Minister. In case of disagreement between the Council and the Prime Minister over the Budget the matter shall be referred to His Majesty.

Treaties and agreements or arrangements with Foreign Powers do not have to be submitted to the Council.

His Majesty has the power of veto on any legislation approved by the Council. Furthermore His Majesty may in any emergency or whenever in His opinion the public interest or security requires it, enact legislation without reference to the Legislative Council. In case of any veto His Majesty shall in a message to the Council set forth the reasons for His action.

2. Administrative

The Council may interpellate the Ministers on any matter affecting the Government. The Ministers are bound to give explanations unless incompatible with public interest.

The Council may, by 2/3 majority, pass a vote of lack of confidence in the Prime Minister. In such case the Prime Minister and Cabinet must tender their resignations to His Majesty. His Majesty may accept or refuse to accept as he deems proper in the public interest.

3. Organization

The Council may select its own presiding officer and shall adopt rules for its deliberation and work.

Ordinarily all meetings of the Council shall be in public. The Council may, however, by a majority vote, go into executive session which shall be secret.

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B. MEMORANDUM CONCERNING THE PROPOSED CHANGES
IN THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

I have doubts whether it is advisable to adopt in its entirety the proposed plan for a new constitution. I express these views with some diffidence as I fully realize that my knowledge of the Siamese people is limited. On the other hand I have had a long experience with popular government. I am not one of those who believe that unlimited monarchy should continue to exist indefinitely in Siam. The time will undoubtedly come when some distribution of power will have to be made. I do not believe however that that time has yet arrived.

There is one marked difference between the two important aspects of the proposed plan:--The creation of a Prime Minister and the creation of a Legislative Council with both legislative and administrative functions. While the creation of a Prime Minister would be an important change it cannot be deemed fundamental. At present His Majesty is His own Prime Minister and exercises His power as Chief Executive through responsible ministers. The experiment of a Prime Minister can be tried without serious consequences even if it should prove unsuccessful.

The creation of a Legislative Council with a substantial number of elected members exercising both legislative and executive functions is of quite a different category. It is extremely difficult to withdraw political power once granted to the people. As a rule such organizations when once created tend inevitably to acquire more power. Accordingly such experiments should not be made until it is clear that, in the words of Lord Bacon, "The necessity be urgent or the utility evident." I do not believe a Legislative Council would render the Government of Siam more efficient or wiser than the present Government. Also I do not believe a desire for some form of popular government is widespread among the people.

It is true that a period of depression such as now exists in Siam always creates some re-action against the Government in power. However, His Majesty's Government is not responsible for the economic depression. Since in large measure the present unrest is due to economic reasons and not because of dissatisfaction with the form of Government it is not advisable to attempt to allay that unrest through changes in the constitution.

In stating the opinion that the greater part of the Siamese people are not yet fit to take part in the national Government I would not be understood as casting reflections on the natural capacity of the Siamese race as compared with the Burmese or other Eastern races where elected Legislative Councils now exist. In fact the capacity of the Siamese for government has been amply shown by the achievements of members of the Royal Family and officials of the Government. The situation in Burma is fundamentally different from the situation in Siam. Burma for many generations has been ruled by an alien power. Naturally there exists in Burma a wide-spread feeling against English rule. Siam

has been, on the other hand, always ruled by its own people and the Siamese people have been loyal to their rulers.

Furthermore in Burma the people have had political training through their participation in local Government for many years before the creation of the Legislative Council. In Siam so far there is no form of real local self government. The best method of training a people for self government is to give them first some control over and responsibility for their local interests with which they are in direct contact.

I would suggest as a safe course that the changes to be made in the immediate future in Siam should be restricted to the creation of a Prime Minister with a fixed term and the creation of municipal governments and that the question of the establishment of a Legislative Council should be deferred.

(Signed) Raymond B. Stevens
Office of Adviser in Foreign
Affairs, 9th March, 1932.

RBS:SP

C. MEMORANDUM

1. In compliance with the Royal Command, a plan for the institution of government by Prime Minister and for the establishment of a Legislative Council has been drawn up.

Owing to the limited time at our disposal, this plan has been worked out with a certain element of haste and there is no pretension that it is perfect or final.

2. In practice it will be found that the success of the plan would entirely depend upon the question of personnel. This is all the more so in the case of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. The choice of the Prime Minister is of extreme importance.

3. The establishment of a Legislative Council, however, implies a very fundamental change in the present constitution. It constitutes the first step towards parliamentary government, and when once it is set up, the tendency will naturally be to extend its activities and increase its power.

4. Is the present an opportune time to effect a fundamental change in the constitution?

There is at present a feeling of dissatisfaction prevailing amongst a certain class of people, brought about primarily by the world economic depression. In order to meet the financial situation the government has been reluctantly compelled to make drastic cut[s] in government expenditure and to impose new emergency taxes. These measures will to a certain extent increase the feeling of discontent with the government. In these circumstances there are rumours current that there will be an attempt to overthrow the government at some future occasion. Although some of these rumours appear to be wild and unreliable, yet it would be wise for the government to be prepared for all eventualities. In time[s] like this, it is imperative that there should be a feeling of confidence and unity amongst all the members of the government. There should be no change which would weaken the power of the government.

The answer to the question raised at the beginning of this paragraph is that much depends upon the effect of the change that is proposed. Until the present financial crisis is over, no change in the constitution should be adopted which would have the effect of weakening the power of the government.

5. In order to insure the satisfactory working of a Legislative Council, it is essential that the members of the Council should possess a certain amount of training in the work which is to be entrusted to them. In this respect the experience of our neighbours may be of interest to us. Both in India and Burma, no Legislative Council was set up until the inhabitants have had [had had] some local training in self government. The best training for local self government would seem to be the establishment of municipalities in the more advanced parts of

the countryo In the case of Burma municipalities were set up as early as 1884, but the present Burma Legislative Council was not set up till 1923.

In the case of Siam, a law for the setting up of municipalities has now been drafted. It is respectfully submitted that the draft law should be examined and, if found agreeable, should be adopted and put into forceo This will enable the local communities to gain some experience in self government. When sufficient experience has been gained in this way, a Legislative Council could be set up with a certain measure of confidence that it will function well and wisely.

Saranromya Palace
Bangkok 9th Marcho 1932o

(Signed) Phya Srivisar
[Phya Sri Wisarn Waja]

VIII. LETTER ON THE EVE OF THE *COUP*

Introduction

Late in May of 1932, Prince Dhani, the Minister of Public Instruction sent King Prajadhipok a copy of a statement of Mussolini on education policy in Italy, which stressed the role of education as a bulwark of the political ideology of the state. On May 27 the king wrote the comments translated here, which were incorporated in letters of June 1 from the royal secretary to Prince Dhani and the members of the Supreme Council of State.¹

In his comments, Prajadhipok alludes again to the difficulty of restoring the prestige of the absolute monarchy (see I), and then mentions possible alternative political systems. It should be noted that "dictator" and "fascist" as used by Prajadhipok did not have the meanings they would come to have in later years. Hitler had not yet come to power in Germany and the only ruling fascist party was that in Italy, where the government was credited by many with having restored political and social order and instilled a sense of national purpose.²

This was to be one of the last political documents of the absolute monarchy. On June 8 the court left Bangkok for the seaside palace at

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1. The text in the king's hand is in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Public Instruction, 1/1; the letters to Prince Dhani and Prince Damrong are in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 38/17, and the Papers of Prince Damrong, 47/247.
 2. Early in 1929 there was a lively debate in the Thai-language press of Bangkok as to what constituted a 'dictator' and whether such an institution would be beneficial to Siam. One newspaper reported the rumor that Prince Boriphat would be made 'dictator,' and added the hope that the rumor would prove to be true. (The relevant newspaper clippings are collected in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Ministry of the Interior, 26.4/75.)

At the same time the *Bangkok Times* (March 4, 1929) was quoting an article in *Samaggi Sara* pointing to Fascist Italy as a model for Siam, while shortly after the 1932 *coup* the same paper, which was never critical of Thai governments on major questions, translated with favorable comments excerpts from an *Extrême-Asie* article approving the new regime, which said in part:

We have yet to learn who will be the Mussolini of the new Siamese Fascist State. If there is no lasting head, we fear that the People's Party may prove to be singularly like the Chinese Kuomintang and become the occasion of frequent internal difficulties. In the interests of the very sympathetic Siamese people themselves, may this fear prove groundless!

Two days later the *Bangkok Times* published, again approvingly, an article and a sympathetic analysis of the Thai *coup* from the August 4 *Times* of London, which concluded, "Outwardly the new regime is democratic, though there are features in the Constitution which suggest that in practice and at the outset it will be a one-party Government of a mildly Fascist complexion" (*Bangkok Times*, August 27 and 29, 1932).

Hua Hin--a factor of importance in the timing of the *coup*, as many of the plotters were reluctant to take any action which might involve the king personally, while others feared that the use of force in Bangkok while the king was in the capital would strengthen opposition to the *coup*. The journey was by train, with a stop in Nakorn Prathom to visit the famous temple and attend a boy scout ceremony. The king made a short speech to the assembled scouts that was probably his last public statement as absolute ruler, in which he admonished them to love their country and their religion, but never to the point of denigrating the race, country, or religion of others. He stressed that all of the great religions taught noble moral values, and urged the scouts to respect and admire the virtues and accomplishments of peoples of every race and creed. The speech passed virtually unnoticed, but it was a message of tolerance characteristic of Prajadhipok, and an appropriate end to his long and often difficult years as the last absolute king in a rapidly changing world.³

Two weeks later the absolute monarchy in Siam came to an end.^o

3. The text of the speech (in Thai) is in the National Archives, Seventh Reign, Royal Secretariat, 21/1.

It was a theme that was not characteristic of some of the writings of Vajiravudh or, to an even greater degree, some of the policies of governments of the early constitutional period. Not surprisingly, the extreme nationalist phase of the late 1930s and early 1940s saw the development of something of a cult of Vajiravudh, reviving his reputation which in the years immediately following his death had not been high, while Prajadhipok's standing was correspondingly low.

TEXT

[Note: The italics are in the original, and the words in quotation marks are in English in the original.]

This is very "interesting." They are able to teach their children to support the fascist system of government, but can we teach the Thai people to support the "absolute monarchy"? I very much doubt it, for if we begin now *it is already too late*

I feel that it is no longer possible to restore the support and the respect for the monarchy that existed in the former days, because the fathers of present-day students have been criticizing the monarchy until it has become habitual.

Our country uses a "Dictatorship" system of government, but our system is not like other "dictator" systems. On the contrary, it has many characteristics of a "democracy." Thus it is a sort of half-and-half, and we haven't really decided which system we will follow. We fear that if we don't use the system of "democracy" the Westerners will call us "*uncivilized*." The Italians needn't worry--if people criticize them they can ignore it. So because of indecision, our country is "between two stools." Actually, if we adopted the "Fascist" system and established a "fascist party" it might be desirable and the best "way out." But could we do it? If not, perhaps we should prepare for a change to a "Constitutional Monarchy" at the earliest possible moment, and direct education along that path.

Prajadhipok

IX. THE MONARCHY IN TRANSITION

Introduction

In the early hours of June 24, 1932, a small group of military and civilian officials seized control of the government and brought to an end the absolute monarchy in Siam. Relations between the king and the new leaders began badly, went through a period of mutual accommodation and cooperation, and then again deteriorated as irreconcilable differences emerged. These differences ultimately led to the abdication of King Prajadhipok on March 2, 1935, and the publication of his explanatory statement translated here.

On the day of the *coup*, with success still uncertain, the People's Party (as the *coup* group was known) distributed a leaflet attacking Prajadhipok and his government which the *coup* leaders subsequently repudiated as extreme, but which, they said, they had thought justified as a tactical measure to gain public support. It read in part:

When the present King succeeded his brother to the Throne, some people at first expected him to rule with justice for the good of his subjects. Their hopes did not materialize. The King was above the law as before. He appointed his relatives and incompetent favourites to important positions without listening to the voice of the people. He allowed dishonest government officials to abuse their power, such as by receiving bribes in government building projects and buying supplies, seeking profits in the exchange of government money, and spending public money extravagantly. He elevated the royal class and gave them many privileges so as to allow them to oppress the common people. He rules without any guiding principle. As a result, the destiny of the nation was left at random, as evidenced by economic depression and the misery and hardship of the people, which is generally known. The absolute monarch was unable to remedy these wrongs. . . .

The King's government rules dishonestly with deception. It has made the people believe it would promote their economic well-being. But the people have waited in vain. The rulers even insult the people, who feed royalty with their taxes, that they cannot have a voice in government affairs because they are still stupid. Such a statement is nonsense. If the people are stupid then royalty is stupid too, because both are of the same race. That the people are less educated than the royalty is due to the fact that the royalty deliberately withholds their educational opportunities. The royalty fears that when the people are educated they will be able to comprehend the evils of their rulers. . . .

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1. The translation is taken from Thawatt Mekarapong, *History of the Thai Revolution: A Study in Political Behavior* (Bangkok, 1972), pp. 244-245. Dr. Thawatt's book is the fullest account in English of the background and immediate consequences of the *coup*; see however the comments of the present editor in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, 61:2 (July 1973), 185-195.

At the same time that this denunciation of the king and his administration was being circulated the *coup* leaders were inviting Prajadhipok to remain on the throne under a constitution, adding that should he refuse he would be replaced by another member of the royal family or Siam would become a republic. Prajadhipok's final act as absolute monarch was his decision to give up his powers and return to a capital held by hostile forces rather than risk civil war in Siam, and thus noting that he himself had been considering granting a constitution, he agreed to remain as a constitutional monarch, and the possibility of a violent confrontation was averted.² The court returned to Bangkok from the seaside palace at Hua Hin; the members of the royal family who had been detained, who included Prince Damrong and Prince Naris (Prince Purachatra had escaped by train to warn the king) were released; and Prince Boriphat, whom the *coup* leaders regarded as the strong man of the old regime, agreed to live abroad. The Supreme Council of State and the Committee of the Privy Council were abolished, and a temporary Constitution promulgated. A permanent Constitution was then drafted which appeared to restore a measure of power to the monarchy,³ and on December 10, following a ceremony at which the *coup* leaders expressed regret for the criticism of the king and the dynasty made at the time of the *coup*, the new Constitution was proclaimed amid elaborate rituals and national celebrations. It seemed that Siam had made a uniquely peaceful and successful transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional rule.

However, 1933 was to be a year of political difficulties in which the high hopes and good will of the first months of constitutional government were rapidly dissipated. Early in the year Pridi presented his celebrated economic plan,⁴ which brought out into the open deep divisions already existing within the government and precipitated a constitutional crisis. The more conservative faction within the government gained the upper hand, and in April the Assembly was closed, certain provisions of the Constitution were suspended, and Pridi was sent abroad 'to study.'⁵ But two months later the military, with Phya Phahon rather reluctantly at the head, again overthrew the government, and the Assembly was reopened and Pridi recalled to join the government, although it was made clear that there was no question of reviving his controversial economic plan. Rumors of further political unrest to

2. The king's reply to the *coup* leaders said in parti

Physically I am not strong. I have no children to succeed me. My life-expectancy is not long, at least if I continue in this office. I have no desire for position or for personal aggrandisement. My ability to advance the progress of the race alone constrains me.

(From the translation in Kenneth Perry Landon, *Siam in Transition*, Chicago, 1939; reprinted 1968, p. 10.)

3. Dr. Thawatt, in *History of the Thai Revolution*, Chapter 4, argues that in fact the royal powers were more illusory than real, and Prajadhipok's abdication statement confirms that in practice this was the case.
4. On Pridi's plan see Landon, *Siam in Transition*, particularly the documents in Appendix III, pp. 260-318, and Pierre Fistié, *Sous-Développement et Utopie au Siam: Le Programme de Réformes Présenté en 1933 par Pridi Phanomyong* (Paris, 1969), which includes a French translation of Prajadhipok's critique of the plan. Prajadhipok's objections were originally published in Thai, and Fistié's book has also recently been translated and published in Thai.

come were widespread, and in October Prince Bowaradej led provincial troops against the Bangkok government.⁵ After fierce fighting on the outskirts of Bangkok the rebels were repulsed. The king's only public statement during the rebellion expressed his regret that Thai were fighting Thai, and he consequently incurred the enmity of both sides, each of which felt that his public support would have insured its quick success. Despite the rebellion the government went ahead with the scheduled November elections to choose one half of the members of the National Assembly, and the king himself was present at the election for the province of Songkla.

Relations between the king and the government had been strained since the 'second *coup*' of June 1933, and the October rebellion made matters more difficult. Late in 1933 the king decided to go abroad for further treatment of his eyes, despite government requests that he remain in Siam and offers to bring specialists to Bangkok. In January of 1934 the king left Siam never to return, going first to Java for a reunion with Prince Boriphat and other leading members of the royal family, and then to Europe. With the king out of the country the gulf between the king and the government grew wider. The king complained that various government measures infringed both on traditional royal prerogatives, such as the right to grant pardons in the case of death sentences, and on new constitutional powers, such as the right to have a voice in the selection of appointed members of the National Assembly, and he also called for the release of political prisoners. He argued that so long as the government was not truly democratic the role of the monarchy should be more than a ceremonial one, and he proposed various constitutional and other changes which would have had the effect of considerably increasing royal powers, warning that if his proposals were not accepted he would have no choice but to abdicate. The government, aware of the high regard in which the king was held by the people and of the value of the monarchy as a unifying symbol, did not want the king to abdicate, but on the other hand it was unwilling to agree to his proposals. In lengthy negotiations the government "attempted the impossible—that is, to try to prevent the King from abdicating and at the same time to turn down his proposals in the most tactful and polite way."⁶ In November of 1934 a special government mission was sent to England to see the king, but no agreement was reached, and following the government's final refusal of his terms, Prajadhipok signed the abdication instrument on March 2, 1935.

The abdication statement summarized Prajadhipok's case against the government; the government replied by publishing a large volume of documents concerning the negotiations between the king and Bangkok.⁷

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5. Although this is always described as a royalist rebellion, Prince Bowaradej's motives remain somewhat obscure. Prince Bowaradej was on bad terms with several of the highest members of the royal family, and before the 1932 *coup* had been in contact with Phya Phahon and other dissidents and had been considered a possible leader of a plot against the absolute monarchy. The government claimed that Prince Bowaradej wanted to put himself on the throne. One consequence of the rebellion was the imprisonment for eleven years of Bowaradej's younger brother, Prince Sithiporn (see II)i
 6. Thawatt Mekarapong, *History of the Thai Revolution*, p. 223.
 7. แถลงการณ์เรื่องพระบาทสมเด็จพระปรมินทรมหาประชาธิปกพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว ทรงสละราชสมบัติ (Government Report on the Abdication of King Prajadhipok), Bangkok, 1935, 456 pp. This volume includes (pp. 101-116) the text of a December 1934 memorandum (in

Prajadhipok was the first Thai king to abdicate since the mid-eighteenth century, when the next to last king of the Ayutthayan line gave up the throne;⁸ paradoxically, this last absolute monarch abdicated because he considered the government not to be sufficiently democratic. The history of Thai democracy in the succeeding forty years has been one of vicissitudes, and in recent years Prajadhipok's abdication statement, with its strongly democratic flavor, has been frequently cited and quoted by proponents of democracy in Siam,⁹ and Prajadhipok himself has received belated recognition as a central figure in modern Thai political history.

The translation of the statement given here is from the Thai text in the government volume; the Thai text has been republished a number of times, as, for example, recently in Chalee Iamkrasanthu, editor,

Buang Lang Phra Pokklao Sala Ratchasombat (เบื้องหลังพระปกเกล้าละราชสมบัติ; Behind the Abdication of King Prajadhipok), Bangkok, 1973, pp. 466-471,¹⁰ and (with one paragraph missing) in *Sat Kan Muang*, pp. 38-40. There is an English translation in the *New York Times*, March 4, 1935; an English translation of excerpts in the *Times* of London of the same date, reprinted in Thawatt Mekarapong, *History of the Thai Revolution*, pp. 249-251; and yet another English translation in Landon, *Siam in Transition*, pp. 257-259.

Thai) by Prajadhipok, frequently reprinted in recent years, which elaborates the arguments of the abdication statement. The king objected particularly to having no role in the selection of the appointed members of the Assembly, and to the fact that under the 1932 constitution only a simple majority was required to override a royal veto of an Assembly act, and this in an Assembly which was half nominated by the government. The king said that his various demands were put forward not because he wanted power--in fact he was "thoroughly tired of politics"--but because he could not continue to bear responsibility while having no real authority (p. 110).

The government's position in the dispute was summarized in English in M. Sivaram, "Siam in Transition," *Siam Today*, July 1936, pp. 33-39. (*Siam Today* was a government publication; Madhvan Sivaram was an Indian national who for many years worked for English-language newspapers in Bangkok, and who wrote several books on the early constitutional period.) Landon has concluded that "The impartial reader finds the king's demands moderate," and "Few kings have come through political revolution as unscathed, and with such dignity as King Prajadhipok" (*Siam in Transition*, pp. 40-43).

8. There are indications, however, that had he lived longer King Mongkut would have abdicated in favor of his son Chulalongkorn. (See also footnote 10.)
9. See for example Chai-anan Samuthwanich, editor, *Sat Kan Muang* (Bangkok, 1971), p. 300.
10. This work includes the text (pp. 15-16) of a confidential record of a meeting held only days after the *coup* at which Prajadhipok, citing particularly his eye problems, discussed with the leaders of the new government the possibility of abdication. The king noted that even before the *coup* took place he had been considering such a step, and that both Mongkut and Chulalongkorn had also contemplated abdication.

KING PRAJADHIPOK'S ABDICATION STATEMENT

Noel, Cranleigh, England

When Phya Phahon and his party took control of the government by force on June 24, 1932, they sent me a message inviting me to remain as a constitutional monarch. I accepted on the understanding that Phya Phahon and his party would establish a constitution like those in other countries using this system, so that the people would have the right to express their views on the administration of the country and policies affecting the public welfare. I was already in favor of such a system and was considering how such a change in the administration of Siam could be made without upheaval. Since the *coup* had taken place and the leaders said that they wanted only to establish a constitution which, in fact, was also my intention, I thought that for the sake of order and peace in the country it was proper for me to go along with their wishes. I tried to assist in maintaining good order so that this important change could be made as smoothly as possible, but my efforts were without avail, because the new leaders failed to establish real political freedom, nor did they truly listen to the wishes of the people. From the two Constitutions it can be seen that the power to carry out various policies rested solely with the People's Party and their supporters, not with the elected representatives of the people. For instance, the temporary Constitution made it clear that anyone not having the support of the People's Party could not serve as a member of the National Assembly. The permanent Constitution was an improvement, owing to representations I made, but still one half of the membership of the Assembly was appointed. I agreed to having two categories of members in the hope that the second category members, whom I was to appoint, would be chosen freely from those with ability and experience in government administration, without regard to their party affiliation, so that they might assist and guide the elected members. But when the time came to appoint second category members I had no voice at all in their selection, and the government chose practically all from among its supporters, regardless of experience. Also, some members of the People's Party favored making radical changes in the economic policy of the country. This caused a split within the People's Party, leading, upon the recommendation of the government then in power, to the closing of the Assembly and the suspending of some sections of the Constitution, which resulted in political unrest. Subsequently Phya Phahon and his group again seized power by force, and ever since then the hope that changes could be effected smoothly has dimmed.

Because the People's Party did not establish real political freedom, and the people had no opportunity to express their opinions before important policy decisions were made, a rebellion broke out, with Thai killing Thai.

When I asked that the Constitution be revised to make it truly democratic so that it might satisfy the public, the government and its supporters, who now hold absolute power, would not agree. I asked that the people be given an opportunity to express their views before changes were adopted in important policies affecting the public welfare, but

the government refused. Even in meetings of the Assembly on important questions, such as my various requests, the members did not have an opportunity to study the questions carefully and in detail because they were pressed to reach a decision immediately in a single session. Furthermore, the government promulgated a law for the suppression of persons accused of political crimes which is contrary to universally accepted principles of justice in that the accused have no opportunity to defend themselves in court and the proceedings are by secret trial before a committee--a procedure which I never used even when I had absolute powers. I asked that this procedure be abandoned, but the government refused.

I feel that the government and its party employ methods of administration incompatible with individual freedoms and the principles of justice. I am unable to agree to any person or any party carrying on such a government in my name.

I am willing to surrender the powers I formerly exercised to the people as a whole, but I am not willing to turn them over to any individual or any group to use in an autocratic manner without heeding the voice of the people.

Now I see that my desire that the people have a real voice in the affairs of the country has not been fulfilled, and as I feel that there is no longer any way for me to assist and protect the people I therefore desire to abdicate and leave my position as king as from this time. I wish to renounce all my kingly privileges, but to retain all the rights which were mine before my accession to the throne.

I do not wish to exercise my legal right to name a successor.

Furthermore, I have no desire that anyone create a disturbance in the country on my behalf; if anyone uses my name in this connection, it should be understood that it is done without my approval or support.

I deeply regret that I am no longer able to serve my people and my country in accordance with the hopes and intentions which I inherited from my forefathers. I can but pray that Siam will prosper and that the people will have happiness.

PRAJADHIPOK
March 2, 1935